"Through Fire and Water"—WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE
"Uncode My Double Cross"—A Novelette—W. L. ROHDE

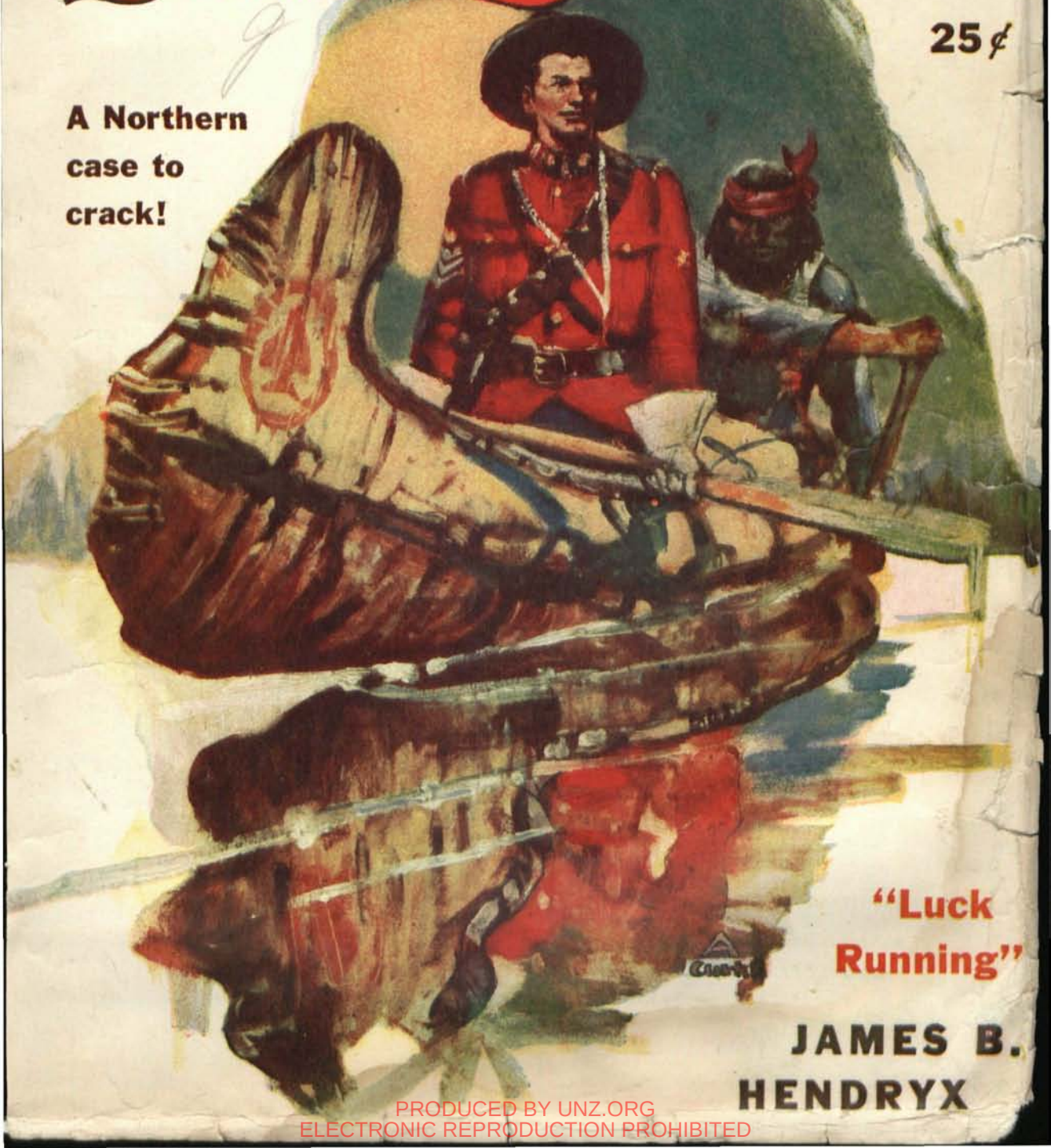
ANC

Short Stories

December 10th

25¢

A Northern case to crack!



"Luck Running"

JAMES B. HENDRYX

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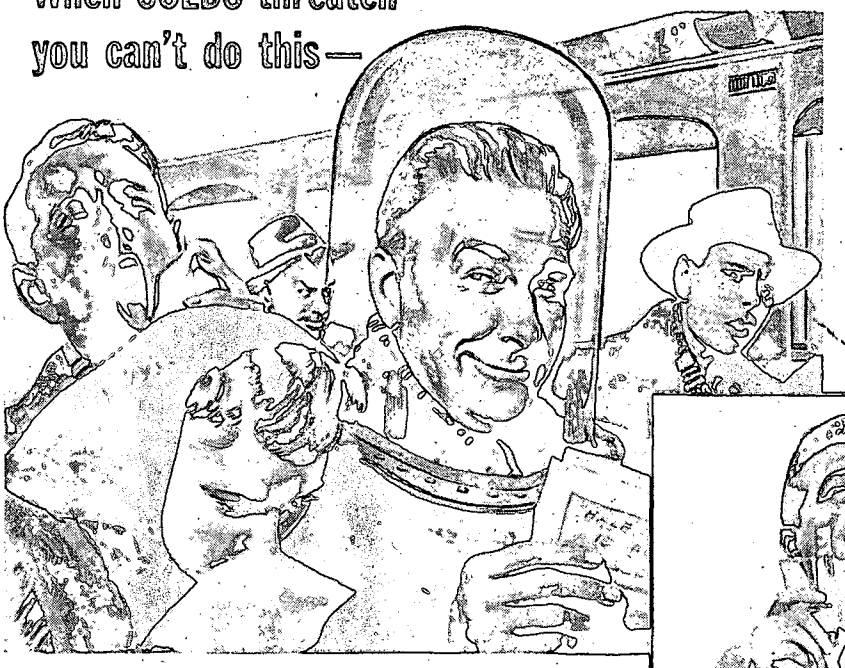
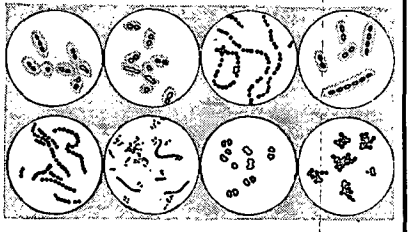
When COLDS threaten you can't do this—



... but you can do this—Gargle

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC QUICK!



"SECONDARY INVADERS"

TOP ROW, left to right: Pneumococcus Type III, Pneumococcus Type IV, Streptococcus viridans, Friedlander's bacillus. BOTTOM ROW, left to right: Streptococcus hemolyficus, Bacillus influenzae, Micrococcus catarrhalis, Staphylococcus aureus.

IF, like the man in the picture, you could isolate yourself from germs spread by other people, you might stand a better chance of avoiding a severe cold this winter.

But since you can't wear a glass dome over your head, it's wise to enlist the aid of the Listerine Antiseptic gargle early and often. Especially so, if you have been in close contact with other people who have colds, or if your feet get wet or cold, or if you have been exposed to sudden changes of temperature.

Such exposure may be all that is necessary to give a foothold to germs called the "secondary invaders." Unless you act quickly these germs may invade the throat tissues to produce many of those miserable aspects of a cold you know so well.

Listerine Antiseptic reaches way back on throat surfaces to kill hosts of these "secondary invaders." Used in time, it may give Nature a helping hand in throwing off the infection. In tests, germs on throat and mouth surfaces were reduced as much as 96.7% fifteen minutes after the Listerine Antiseptic gargle, as much as 80% one hour after.

Bear in mind Listerine Antiseptic's impressive record made in tests over 12 years! Those who gargled with Listerine Antiseptic twice a day had fewer colds and usually milder colds than those who did not gargle . . . and fewer sore throats.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. Louis, Missouri*

P.S. Have you tried the new Listerine Tooth Paste, the Minty 3-way Prescription for your Teeth?

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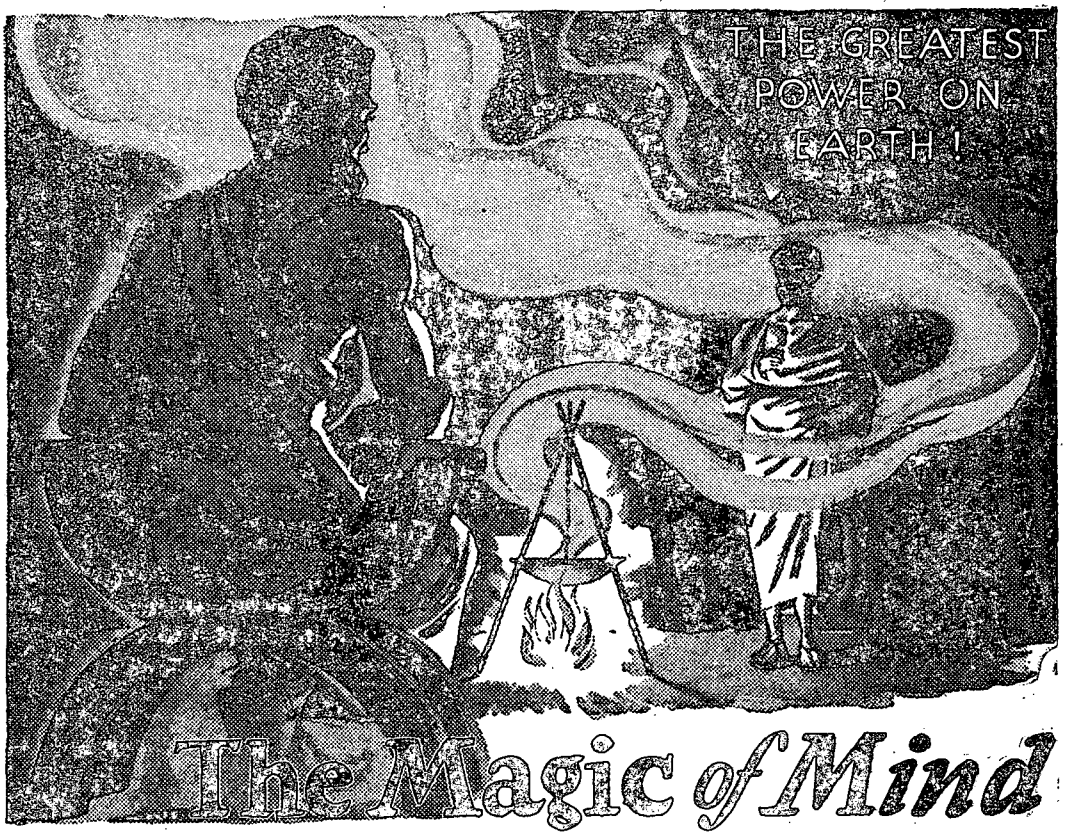

The Magic of Mind

WERE the great personages of the past victims of a stupendous hoax? Could such eminent men of the ancient world as Socrates, Pericles, and Alexander the Great have been deluded and cast under the spell of witchcraft—or did the oracles whom they consulted actually possess *a mysterious faculty of foresight?* That *the human mind can truly exert an influence over things and conditions* was not a credulous belief of the ancients, but a known and demonstrable fact to them. That there exists a wealth of infinite knowledge just beyond the border of our daily thoughts, which can be aroused and commanded at will, was not a fantasy of these sages of antiquity, but a dependable aid to which they turned in time of need.

It is time you realized that the rites, rituals and practices of the ancients were not superstitions, but subterfuges to conceal the marvelous workings of natural law from those who would have misused them. Telepathy, projection of thought, the materializing of ideas into helpful realities, are no longer thought by intelligent persons to be impossible practices, but instead, *demonstrable sciences,* by which a greater life of happiness may be had.

One of America's foremost psychologists and university instructors, says of his experiments with thought transference and the powers of mind—"The successes were much too numerous to be merely lucky hits and one can see no way for guessing to have accounted for the results." *Have you* that open-minded attitude of today which warrants a clear, positive revelation of the facts of mind which intolerance and bigotry have suppressed for years? *Advance with the times;* learn the truth about your inherited powers.

Let this free book explain

The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been leaders in introducing the ancient wisdom of mental phenomena. Established throughout the world for centuries, they have for ages expounded these truths to those thinking men and women who sought to make the utmost of their natural faculties. Use the coupon below—avail yourself of a pleasing book of interesting information which explains how you may acquire this most *unusual* and *helpful knowledge.*

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Short Stories

TWICE A MONTH

THE BEST OF AMERICA'S ACTION ADVENTURE MYSTERY

THE STORY TELLERS' CIRCLE 4

LUCK RUNNING
(A Long Novelette) **James B. Hendryx** 6
In the Old Days There Weren't Any Chechakos Along the Cricks; By the Time a Man Was Six Months in the Country, He Was Either a Sourdough—Or He Was Dead.

THROUGH FIRE AND WATER
William MacLeod Raine 30
The Feud Between the Harshaws and the Seeleys Went Back a Long Way; and There Had Been Guns Aplenty Along That Way. Now Rampaging Nature Was to Take a Hand in the Game.

THE THIRD HANDLER **Jim Karney** 38
Sometimes You Fight on Sheer Nerve and the Memory of the Guy Who Had Your Name Before You.

CURIODDITIES **Irwin J. Weill** 45

UNCODE MY DOUBLE CROSS
(A Novelette) **William L. Rohde** 46
Can the Staccato Signals of Radio or Telegraph Code Flow from a Dead Man's Hand? Mohawk Daniels Spent No Time Wondering—a Railroad Dick on a Tough Case Uses Any Help He Can Get.

A GUNMAN'S FEUD **Caddo Cameron** 67
Bein' an Outlaw Myself Don't Keep Me from Sayin' That I'd Rather Tangle With a Tough Customer Who Looks Me in the Eye Than Be Condemned by One of These Six-day Sinners and One-day Saints.

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ASSOCIATE EDITOR
LAMONT BUCHANAN

December 10th, 1948

CONTENTS

THE TILTED MOON
(Second Part of Three) — Barry Perowne — 76
The Tilted Moon Was Fulfilling Its Ill Portent. Storm Burst Over the Mediterranean and Out of It Came the Yacht "So Far" With Its Cargo of Adventurers.

DEMONS DON'T MAKE FOOTPRINTS — Arthur H. Carhart — 103
A Skilled Mechanic Working for a Fishing Tackle Concern —Not Exactly the Type of Man to Explain a Murder by Drawing — Almost — on the Supernatural. But There It Is!

PAY-OFF AT TAMARACK PASS
(A Novelette) — Jack Rutherford — 108
The Good Book Says to Turn the Other Cheek, but Don't Turn So's You Can't Draw a Bead With Your Six-gun!

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER — Pete Kuhlhoff — 127

SUBJECT TO FURTHER ORDERS — Benton E. Cook — 131
It Was Issues That Were Being Evaded—Men and Vessels. Morale Among the Officers? Bad. Licensed Men Resentful. Ships in Poor Condition, Tinkered With Just Enough to Get Them By Inspection.

COVER—Benton Clark

EVERY AUTHOR'S FINEST AND LATEST STORIES NO REPRINTS

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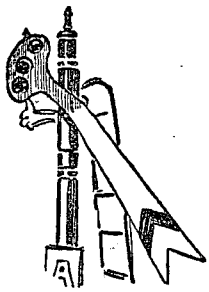
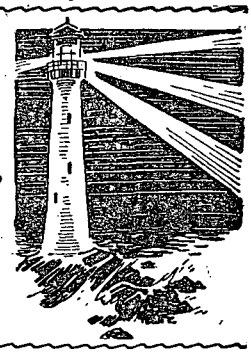


The Story Tellers' Circle



Brass-Pounding Frontiersmen

NOT being brass-pounders ourselves, we asked Bill Rohde how he figured out that mighty interesting telegraph-radio code criss-cross in "Uncode My Double-Cross." We've found that when you ask the creator of Al Hammers and Mohawk Daniels something, you get the answers back in a flash—must be that telegraph reflex. He's what he writes:

"There's enough romantic and action-packed history in the story of telegraph and radio development to fill a library. I've often wondered why more books haven't been written about the trade—maybe I'll have to do 'em myself.

"You can start with the first threads of wire that crept out from the Atlantic seaboard—the battles for rights-of-way—the struggles against ignorance and superstition and outright knavery. (One statesman claimed he felt ill since the wires reached his community, and blamed the 'electro-impulses'. Later he was found to hold a block of stock given him in a rival telegraph company.)

"There is sparkle in the competition of the old-time newspaper men for the few circuits, when they had operators telegraph the Bible and the dictionary from Newfoundland, to hold the line while awaiting a ship with a hot story from Europe. The magnificent courage of the boy telegraphers during the Civil War—and the thousands upon thousands of railroad adventures in which telegraph played a part.

"For a long time the wires were the threads of communication across the Western plains, and many a lineman left his bones but not his scalp beside the small poles, crude insulators, and light wires. In a later day, many a speculator left his financial carcass, picked clean, in a broker's office, when he went up against a shrewd trader who had been a telegrapher and could read the sounder's chatter about latest prices and market movements.

"The railroad boomers were a grand telegraph tribe in themselves. I was one—and know many. The modern crop is mighty scarce, but they carry on in the old tradition. I knew one who overhauled the instruments in every office he hit, and left them polished and varnished as a monument to his visit—and another who used to work for a southern road every winter, and depart with the station cash in the spring.

"About the connection between American Morse and International; in the early days of radio Morse was on the air, but as a Chief Radio Officer during the last war I made only one brief American Morse contact. All the rest was standard International, which incidentally is 5 percent slower.

"Conversely, I have used and overheard International on railroad Morse wires, used by ops to insure a private chit-chat. While stationed at Virginia Beach Coast Guard Radio some years ago, I noticed the boys using International on the remains of the old Coast Guard coastal wire. I wonder if they still do?

"For Morse men, one of the most pleasant events of each year is the annual dinner of the Morse Telegraph Club of America, when the diners across the nation are connected by wire."

It was a thrill to talk to Chicago and Fort Worth a few months ago from a famous restaurant in lower Manhattan. But—there was an awful lot of white hair around the tables.

"Does Mohawk Daniels really know telegraph? He sures does—I helped teach him. He knew International, so it was an extra tough job. (Strangely enough, it is easy for

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a Morse man to learn International, but not vice-versa) The knowledge is handy for Daniels, if only to increase the respect of the telegraphers and towermen he contacts in his work.

"One of the most amusing telegraph stories is about an operator in the Midwest who was forced to drive a gunman. The op tooted the horn a good deal—and before long the cops were stopping the car. Another op had caught the alarm.

". . . and if you're a good op, you can call those baseball plays long before the sportscaster, when you're listening to a game with telegraph in the background. The sounder runs far ahead of the talk—so you shouldn't have to pay for any drinks."

William L. Rohde

Barry's Aunt

BARRY PEROWNE maintains that his propensity for exciting and adventurous reading matter is a family matter.

"*I had,*" writes "The Tilted Moon's" author, "*a very respectable, elderly aunt with a deep and secret passion for sensational reading matter. Furtively, she used to slip me the choicest items from her skull-and-crossbones library. When I was about eight, she gave me Bram Stoker's* Dracula. *I read it illicitly all one night, and scared myself so much I haven't got over it yet. For some strange reason, the effect this fright had on me was that the very next day I started writing!*

"*It was a serial, and I read the first installment to my old aunt, whom I used to visit every Saturday. She told me that for every installment I brought her she would give me sixpence and a bag of doughnuts. I kept that serial going until I left school, and I have never since been able to rid myself of a conception of economics in which eating depends on writing.*

"*The school I went to was for soldiers' sons—my father was overseas taking a hand in World War I—and the teachers were hardboiled old regular non-coms. who cussed in Hindustani and used the birch at the drop of a spitball. (I got to be an infantry sergeant myself in World War II, and this barracks experience and the Hindustani cuss words came in mighty useful.)*

"*I left school young, fourteen—and glad to see the back of it—and being a self-taught, scrambled kind of shorthand writer, got a job as secretary to a Hindu historian at Oxford. He was enormously fat, and he sat elephantine in an earthquake chaos of tumbled books in a room with all the shades permanently drawn. He never, to my knowledge, put his nose in the open air, and he was forever munching cucumbers, which he peeled downward, like bananas, and consumed amid dangling festoons of rind.*

"*I seldom understood a word uttered by this dusk-haunting savant, and used to go by guess most of the time. He mildly pointed out that the first book I typed for him contained 1,813 spelling mistakes of my making, but, miraculously, he didn't fire me; he may have used awfully long words, but he had the patience of a fakir. When I left him—I was about sixteen—it was because I had begun to sell stories to magazines.*

"*I went to London and did editorial work; but I had an itching foot, and after two years, resigned to go freelancing. For the next twelve years, I traveled and lived in many countries, relying on my pen. Periods of high prosperity, as when stories of mine were bought for motion pictures, alternated with periods of partial eclipse, during which latter I had a good many—to me—amusing experiences around the Mediterranean and in Africa, particularly in company with a certain wicked, old, likeable, American soldier of fortune.*

"*Meantime, I wrote short stories for American and British magazines and published about twenty books. I married, and we continued to live mostly abroad till the war broke out. I joined the British infantry (Wiltshire Regiment), accumulated three years calluses on my feet, then was transferred to Intelligence and did another two-and-a-half years, mostly attached to U. S. forces in France, Luxembourg, Berlin, etc.*

"*I've now been back at the typewriter for the past couple of years. I have one daughter. My hobbies are travel, fly-fishing, wild-fowling, and any game whatever that's played with a ball.*"

Barry Perowne

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Luck Running

By
JAMES B. HENDRYX

BOB LOWRIE weighed the dust, added it to the contents of a little moosehide sack, tied the sack, and producing notebook and pencil, made a notation. "Thirteen ounces today," he said. "That makes twenty-nine hundred and seventy-two ounces all told. We ought to be cleaned up in a week."

Tom Cole turned from the stove where he had dropped a thick moose steak into the frying pan. Savory gray smoke permeated the air and he raised his voice above the

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. . . *Even Sourdoughs Ain't Quite the Same in the Spring as They Are in the Fall, Let Alone Chechakos*

sound of the sizzling. "How much is that in money?" he asked.

Lowrie figured with his pencil. "At sixteen dollars an ounce it's forty-seven thousand five hundred and fifty-two dollars. Back in the States it would be more. We've done mighty well for ourselves, Tom—a lot better than most of the chechakos. I've kept track of everything." He paused and consulted the notebook. "It was the third of October when we started that first shaft, and we've put in 225 days. That figures—let's see—it figures two hundred and eleven dollars and thirty-four cents a day. And our expenses haven't been over a thousand. Not bad for a couple of greenhorns, eh?"

Cole nodded, turned the steak, and opened the door to let some of the smoke out. "Yeah, we sure were lucky when we ran onto old John Price last fall with his leg in that bear trap. Even if she'd found him Stella couldn't have released him. And

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she could never have got back with help in time to save him. Tell you the truth—when he told us to locate this bend three miles above his stakes, I was doubtful. I wondered why, if he and Stella had as good a thing as he said they had on Moosehorn, he didn't tell us to locate right next to 'em?"

"I was doubtful, too, till Stella told us the same thing."

"Sure—but she was just as thankful when we got him to the cabin as he was—maybe more so. She sure thinks a heap of her dad."

"Seems to make a lot of difference to you who Stella Price thinks a heap of," grunted Cole, prodding the steak with his fork.

Lowrie frowned. "I'll say it does. And I'm not the only one, either."

Cole shifted the frying pan from stove to table, set the tea pail beside it, divided the steak, and forked half of it onto his plate. Lowrie regarded the rare meat with disfavor, returned the frying pan to the stove, and standing beside it, turned the steak until it was done through. As he returned to the table Cole was finishing his supper. Draining his teacup, he rose and picked up the little sack into which Lowrie had emptied the dust. "I'll take this to the cache," he said.

The other glanced toward the doorway. "It won't be dark for a long time yet," he said. "Better wait."

"Don't bother. If I decide to go, I'll walk. Old John'll be about ready for a stud game."

"Thought I'd just drop in and see how they're getting along with the clean-up," Lowrie said. "I wasn't thinking of stud."

"You wouldn't be—with all the markers you're holding. You've got about six thousand of mine—and twice that of old John's. They're payable when the dumps are cleaned up. No wonder you want to find out how they're coming. You'd like to cash those markers before your luck changes. That's why you wouldn't go down last Sunday night when I wanted to. I see through your game, all right."

Lowrie flushed hotly. "Look here, Tom Cole—you know damned well that isn't so! Sure, my luck's been running. And I know it's got to break some time. The reason I've been fighting shy of stud lately is because of Stella. When Old John plays, he drinks more than he should—and Stella don't like that."

"Oh, sure—lay it onto Stella! But in the meanwhile you hold those markers—and it's damned close to the clean-up."

Lowrie put on his hat and paused in the doorway. "I'll still wait, if you want to shave," he said, in a hard dry tone. "And I'll play stud—all the stud you want. And believe me, I'll play 'em high, wide, and handsome! If my luck is still running I'll have plenty more of your markers, and Old John's, too. If the streak has broken, you'll have the chance to get 'em all back. How does that suit you?"

Cole shrugged. "Suits me, all right. But don't wait. I'll walk. You'll have an hour or so to get it across to Stella that I'm the one that forced the stud game—not you."

Cole laughed shortly. "Afraid old John Price or Stella might locate our cache and rob us? There's no one else on Moosehead Crick."

"They're the only ones located here. But there's plenty of chechakos prowling the hills, and sourdoughs, too, for that matter. We'd sure be out of luck if some thief did locate that cache."

"Guess we aren't taking much of a chance," Cole retorted, balancing the sack in his hand. "There's only been two parties through here all spring. I'll take Duke along. He'll know if anyone's prowling around. You're getting finicky as an old woman."

"Okay. But I'd hate like the devil to lose all that dust, when a little common sense would save it." Ignoring the retort, Cole stepped from the room, followed by the huge husky dog who had raised his head at mention of his name.

Lowrie finished his steak, washing it down with a cup of tea. "Tom's changing," he muttered to himself. "He's getting touchy lately. Guess I'll go down the crick."

Slopping some hot water into the wash basin he carried the little mirror outside to catch the waning light, and when Cole returned from the cache, he was finishing shaving. In silence the two washed and dried the dishes. Lowrie emptied the water and hung up the pan. "Thought I'd go down to Price's for a while," he said. "Want to go along? We'll have a full moon coming back."

Cole frowned, and glanced from the other's clean shaven face to the stove. "The

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fire's out and we used up all the hot water on the dishes, so I can't shave. Sure, you'd want to go down to Price's."

"It won't take long to heat some water. I can wait."

The other scowled and whistling to the big husky, crossed the little clearing and stepped into the canoe.

II

STELLA PRICE rose from the bench upon which she and her father had been sitting close to the smudge built before the door of their cabin, as the light craft beached on the gravel. "Hello, Bob! Long time no see!"

The big dog leaped ashore at the sound of the girl's voice, bounded across the open, reared up, and with his fore paws on her shoulders, tried to lick her face. "Down, Duke! Down old fellow!" she cried, then, "Where's Tom?"

Bob Lowrie smiled into the blue eyes—eyes of so deep a blue as to be almost violet, as he joined the two at the smudge. "Tom'll be along pretty quick. I offered to wait while he shaved—but he said he'd rather walk."

Old John's lips twitched at the corners as he eyed the younger man. "So that's it, eh? It's a good thing Dominion Day ain't so far off. Never seen two chechakos yet that could winter through together. It don't make no difference how good friends they was in the fall—they come out in the spring like cat an' dog. Even the sourdoughs ain't quite the same in the spring. I rec'lect back on Forty Mile—it was the year Stella was born—nineteen years ago. There wasn't no chechakos, them days. By the time a man was six months in the country, he was either a sourdough—er he was dead. Dawson wasn't thought of yet. Forty Mile an' Circle City was the only tradin' posts above Fort Yukon. We all figgered the upper river wasn't no good—till Carmack made his strike on Bonanza. Well, that year Jack Banto an' Chris Hanson wintered on Goose Crick—an' they ain't spoke since. No, sir—not a single damn 'hello' has passed between 'em in nineteen years—an' they've lived mostly on the same cricks, too. Jack can be standin' at some bar, an' Chris'll come in an' line up right beside him, an' they'll both drink their drinks, jest like the other wasn't there. An' they'll stand around an' talk with the other boys—even set in the same stud game—but nary a world'll pass between 'em.

"Yet, ten year ago when Chris lost everything he had on account of his shack burnin' on Henderson Crick, damned if Jack didn't hire five Siwashes to take up three ten-dog sledfuls of stuff, an' stay there an' help Chris build a new shack—an' he told 'em if they let on where the stuff come from, he'd kill the hull five of 'em.

"An agin, two years ago, when Jack lost all his money speculatin' in Hunker Crick claims, Chris filed him on what turned out to be one of the best locations on Gold Hill—an' told the recorder he'd brain him if he ever let on who done it.

"But mostly it don't work out like that. The sourdoughs'll come out in the spring kind of grumpy, but one good spree, an' they're all right agin. An' even the chechakos, onct they git to some camp where they can hell around a bit are jest as good friends as ever—an' talk an' laugh over what damn fools they was with their quarrelin' an' bickerin'."

Lowrie smiled. "I hope you're right. Tom's a fine fellow. But for the past month or so he's been getting harder and harder to get along with."

There was a twinkle in old John's eye. "An' how about you?"

"Me? What do you mean?"

"Little things he says an' does kind of bother you, don't they?"

"Sure. That's the trouble. He—"

"Little habits he's got sort of git on yer nerves, eh?"

"That's right."

THE older man nodded sagely. "That's the way it works every time. If you'll stop an' run over them habits, you'll find they ain't none of 'em new ones. He had them same habits all the time—only you've jest begun to notice 'em. You never paid no attention to 'em before—so they didn't bother you. An' yourn didn't bother him. But livin' with 'em, day in an' day out, has begun to wear on yer nerves—both of you. Why—I know a pardnership that busted up because one pardner liked his bacon fried stiff, an' the other one wanted his limber. Little things like that seems foolish when a

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man looks back on 'em—but along towards the tail end of a long winter they loom damn big in a two-man camp."

Lowrie was silent for several moments, then a slow grin twisted the corners of his lips. "Our trouble isn't bacon," he said. "It's moose meat. Tom likes his rare, and I like mine well done. We take turns cooking. It was Tom's turn tonight—and he fried it all rare. Last night I fried it all well done."

Price grinned. "An' it looks like he had more of a kick comin' than you have. You could put your half back in the pan an' fry it some more. But damned if he could unfry his half, onct you'd got it cooked."

"I guess we've both been fools," Lowrie admitted.

"It's human nature, I guess—that an' the calendar. Trouble is, Christmas an' Dominion Day are too damn far apart. Six months is too long between sprees. How you comin' with yer clean-up?"

"We ought to finish in a week."

"Same here. Then we'll go down to Dawson. Couple of weeks in the big camp'll do us all good. You two set here an' tend the smudge. I'll go look after the lamp. If Tom shows up we can have a session of stud."

Lowrie smiled down at the girl seated on the bench fondling the ears of the big husky that sat close against her knees, his head in her lap. "I'm glad you didn't send Duke off with the other dogs to that summer boarding camp," she said. "I hate those camps, with the dogs all chained in long rows, tortured by flies and mosquitoes, and getting nothing but raw fish to eat. No wonder most huskies are bad tempered."

"Oh, I'd never put Duke in a summer camp. He's the best lead dog in the country. He's my pal. I don't know what I'd do without Duke—and Tom acting like he does."

"How does Tom get along with him? Does the fact that he's your dog make any difference? I mean, does he abuse him or tease him, just to plague you?"

"No. Tom thinks as much of Duke as I do. Duke's a pal to both of us. I don't think he knows which one of us he belongs to." Twilight was fast deepening in the little valley. Soft yellow light showed through the window as Price lighted the lamp in the cabin. Lowrie tossed a handful of damp chips into the smudge pail, and seated himself close beside the girl. "I hope Tom decides not to come down, tonight," he said.

"Why?" Stella's fingers stroked the huge head in her lap. She didn't raise her eyes.

"Because I'd rather just sit here and talk to you. Or—or maybe take a walk, or something. It'll be moonlight in a little while. The fact is, Stella, Tom an' I've done mighty well for a couple of chechakos—thanks to your dad. And—and there's something I've wanted to—to tell you, for a long time."

"I guess the book would still show a balance in your favor," the girl said. "I could never have got Dad out of that bear trap—and he'd have died before I could have got help. But even if Tom should come—you don't have to play stud, do you?"

"Yes, the way things are, I've got to play. You see, I'm ahead of the game. The pay-off comes when the dumps are cleaned up. And there isn't much time left. I've got to give 'em a chance to get their money back."

Born in the North, Stella Price knew as well as anyone the ethics of gambling. But she chose to ignore it. "Humph," she sniffed. "I suppose *you* don't like to play."

"Sure I do. But—I'd rather be with you."

"A couple of weeks more and you'll be in Dawson where there are lots of girls."

Lowrie flushed slightly. "I don't want lots of girls. I just want—"

She laughed lightly. "I didn't notice you passing many of them up at the dances around Christmas time."

"Sure, I danced with 'em. But I'd rather have been dancing with you, and I did—every chance I got. But there were so many others—all those old sourdoughs, Bettles, Camillo Bill, Swiftwater Bill, Moosehide Charlie. Why did you have to dance with all of them?"

"I didn't have to. I wanted to. Why—there isn't one of 'em hasn't packed me around on his back—yes and turned me up and paddled me, too, when I needed it—back in Forty Mile. Why, I love those old sourdoughs—every single one of 'em! I've known 'em ever since I was a baby."

Duke raised his head suddenly, cocked his ears, and with a low, throaty growl, bounded off in the direction of the foot trail that led up the creek.

"That will be Tom," Lowrie said grumpily.

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"Yes. And now you can get on with your stud game."

Dog and man emerged suddenly from the scrub timber and crossed the little clearing. Tom Cole glanced at the two who had risen from the bench. "Hope I'm not intruding," he said, a bit stiffly.

The girl laughed. "Certainly not! We've been expecting you. Dad's inside."

Cole forced a smile. "I suppose Bob's been telling you that this stud game is all my doing."

The girl met his glance squarely. "What Bob has been telling me," she said, "is his business—and mine."

The man's eyes dropped, and just then the door opened and Price stepped out, closing the door swiftly behind him. "Hi, Tom! What's be'n keepin' you? Hell, I could have walked up there an' back while you've be'n comin' down! Let's get goin'. I've got the chips all counted out, an' a round of drinks poured, an' all the mosquitoes killed. Stand there in the smudge a minute so you won't fetch none in on yer clothes, an' shet the door quick behind you."

Bob Lowrie hesitated a moment after the others had disappeared. "I'm glad you said that, Stella," he said.

The girl tossed her head without meeting his glance. "Come on, Duke," she said. "You and I will go for a walk."

III

IT WAS nearly an hour later when Stella returned, passed through to her room, and closed the door with scarcely a glance at the three seated about the table intent on the cards.

The two younger men drank sparingly but old John Price had frequent recourse to the jug and as the night wore on the effect of his libations became evident in his play. Normally a conservative player like most of the old-timers, as the liquor took hold, his bets became higher and his bluffs more frequent.

Cole played silently, sullenly almost, his eyes on the run of the cards, his mind concentrated on one objective—to win. But neither he nor Price could win against Bob Lowrie's persistent run of luck.

Lowrie played as he had threatened to play—high, wide and handsome. His thoughts were more often on Stella Price than on the run of the cards—the deep violet of her eyes, the curve of her red lips, the strong brown hands that had stroked Duke's head and rumpled his ears. His heartbeats quickened as he recollected her retort to Cole: "What Bob has been telling me is his business—and mine." If she hadn't cared, she wouldn't have said that.

Mechanically, he dealt the cards, and with utter abandon he laid his bets. Time and again he raised bets with nothing in his hand, only to have the others fold their cards. And time and again, he stayed, calling high bets on each round of cards when apparently he didn't have a chance in the world of winning—ruinous poker under ordinary circumstances—only to have the last card complete a winning hand—a third card to a small pair, the missing card in the middle of a straight, the fifth card to fill a flush. He didn't want Price's dust, nor Tom Cole's. He had dust in the cache, and a half-interest in a good claim. He was playing to lose—to give these men the chance to win back what they had lost. But he couldn't lose. With uncanny persistence the chips and the markers piled up before him.

It was broad daylight—the early daylight of the high north, when the game broke up. Cole was dealing and after a glance at the pip of his hole card, Price laid a substantial bet on an exposed king. Lowrie called without looking at his hole card, on the exposed seven of spades. Cole glanced at his hole card and called on the exposed queen of clubs. He dealt, and Price bet again, having drawn the seven of hearts. Again Lowrie called without looking at his hole card. He had drawn the queen of spades. Cole drew the ten of clubs, and called the bet. Again he dealt. Price paired his king and doubled the amount of his first two bets. Lowrie glanced at his exposed card, the seven of diamonds, and called. Cole called on his exposed seven of clubs, and dealt the last round of cards. Price drew the ten of diamonds. Lowrie drew the queen of diamonds, showing two pairs. He had not yet looked at his hole card—and the others knew he had not looked. He promptly tossed a big bet into the pot. Cole stared down at the trey of clubs he had drawn on the last round. He tilted the edge of his hole card, as if to verify it, and glanced at Lowrie's two

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pairs. "I can see all the sevens, and three of the queens," he said. "By God, you can't hold the caser all the time! I'll double that bet!"

He scribbled a marker and tossed it into the pot.

Price stared at the two hands for several minutes. "I don't figger Bob's filled up. An' what's more, I don't figger you did. Yer settin' jest right to run a whizzer, with them four clubs, Tom. I call it."

Lowrie tilted his hole card and glanced at its pip. He grinned. "It's my night. You can't beat this kind of luck. I ought to raise you, Tom. But I won't bet a sure thing. I call."

Cole flipped over the ace of clubs, showing a flush. Price turned his third king over. And Lowrie showed his hole card—the queen of hearts!

Cole stared for a moment as Lowrie raked in the pot. Then he pushed back from the table. "I've had enough. I know when I'm licked."

OLD JOHN poured a stiff drink from the jug and downed it at a gulp. "There can't no man beat luck like that. But a man's luck runs agin him jest as strong as it ever runs fer him. I shore hope I'm settin' in the game when your luck changes, Bob. Jest add up them markers of mine an' I'll pay you off. 'Tain't likely we'll be playin' agin before we hit Dawson."

Lowrie separated the little slips of paper—markers as they were called in the north—upon which the losers had noted the amounts of bets over and above what chips they had before them on a play. He totaled Price's, and added them to those he drew from his pocket. "Twenty-four thousand, one hundred and sixty, all told," he announced. "That's too damned much for a game like this. We oughtn't to bet 'em so high."

"Oh, hell—bet 'em when you got 'em!" Price said. "That's what I claim. Don't you worry. I'll get it all back—an' interest throw'd in. This ain't the last game we'll be playin'. What does that figger in ounces?"

"Fifteen hundred and ten," Lowrie announced after a pencilled calculation.

"All right. Wait till I go to the cache an' I'll weigh it out fer you."

"Don't bother. You can pay me when we get to Dawson. Besides, a man oughtn't to go to his cache in the daytime—you told me that, yourself."

OLD JOHN laughed, and poured himself another drink. "Fifteen hundred an' ten ounces is right around ninety-five pound. I ain't packin' no sech heft to Dawson in the canoe—not with the water low as it is. We're goin' to have to portage around plenty of rapids, an' I ain't aimin' to back-pack no heft of dust. Better do like I'm goin' to an' leave yer dust in the cache till winter an' let the dogs haul it down. All I'm takin' is enough fer a ten-day whoop-la. An' as fer daylight—no sourdough would rob a cache—an' no damn chechako would be up this early in the mornin'. I'll be back d'rectly." He rose, gathered the markers, and the paper Lowrie had figured on, tossed them into the woodbox, slung a packsack over his shoulder, and stepped from the room. He returned shortly, carrying the packsack, heavy with little sacks of dust which he weighed out and turned over to Lowrie. "Take the packsack along," he said. "You can fetch it back when you come down. An' if I was you I wouldn't say nothin' to Stella about how much I lost. Not that it makes any difference. I've got plenty. But women's funny, that way. They figger like you, that a friendly game hadn't ort to run too high—on account of makin' bad feelin's, er somethin'. But hell—what I claim, friendship that had to be figgered by the ounce wouldn't be worth havin'." He paused and winked as he poured another drink. "Fact is, I'm goin' to sort of be in the doghouse anyway, fer the next day er so. Stella, she don't never say nothin' about a jamboree around Christmas an' Dominion Day, but she sort of keeps her eye on the jug between times. But hell—what I claim, what's a few drinks, now an' then, amongst friends? A man's got to be sociable."

THE trip up the creek in the canoe was made in silence. When the two reached the claim Cole stepped into the cabin, drew off his pacs, and threw himself on his bunk for a few hours sleep. Bob Lowrie didn't feel sleepy. He lifted the packsack heavy with dust from the canoe and overturned the light craft on the gravel. Then he picked

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up the sack and followed by Duke, made his way through the scrub spruce to the rock-wall that rose abruptly from the valley floor to form the west rim. The going was rough along the base of the wall, the ground littered with huge rock fragments that had broken from the irregular face and crashed down into the valley. The man proceeded slowly, his eyes searching the base of the wall.

He paused now and then to examine holes in the rock until, finding one to his liking, he dropped to his knees and one by one removed the little moosehide sacks from the packsack and placed them carefully in the aperture.

Tearing a leaf from his notebook, he scribbled a few words, thrust the paper under the tie string of the topmost sack, and carefully fitted a piece of loose rock over the mouth of the hole. Then with the empty packsack swinging from his arm, he returned to the cabin.

The week that followed was not so bad. With thoughts of the big celebration in Dawson to relieve the monotony, the petty bickering between the partners had almost ceased.

On the evening of the day they finished cleaning up the dump Cole hung the dish towel on its nail, and glanced toward his partner who was returning the dishes to their shelf. "If you'll add up those markers of mine, Bob, I'll pay you what they call for."

Lowrie fished the slips from his pocket and added them up.

"Eight thousand, three hundred and twenty dollars—that figures just five hundred and twenty ounces. But gosh, Tom—I don't like to take it from you. Why not just forget it?"

Cole frowned. "I'm not forgetting it. I'm paying it. I'm like old John. Your luck's running now. But it will break sometime. And when it does, I'll get those ounces back, and plenty more with 'em."

"Okay. We'll go to the cache and get out what we want for expenses in Dawson. Write out an I.O.U. and just leave it in the cache. We won't be packing that dust down with us. We'll let the dogs haul it down at Christmas time. We'll be pulling out in a week. The Prices will probably be ready, and we'll all go down together."

IV

STELLA PRICE had risen early on the morning following the stud game in the cabin. She had stepped from her tiny bedroom and sniffed the dead air, heavy with the odor of stale tobacco smoke. Cards and chips littered the table top. Stooping she had picked up the jug from the floor beside her father's place and holding it to her ear had shaken it. It was much lighter than it had been the night before, and she had frowned. Setting it in a corner, she had put the cards and chips on the shelf, and stepping outside, had kindled the smudge in the bucket, breathing deeply of the pure clean air.

Reentering the room she had left the door open, and proceeded to build a fire in the cook stove. As she had stooped over the woodbox, some scraps of paper met her eye. She had picked them up, and recognized her father's scrawling chirography: "200 J P," "400 J P," and so on. She had collected them all and totaled them. They corresponded with the neatly pencilled memorandum in Lowrie's handwriting which she had also picked from the woodbox. She tossed the slips into the stove, lighted the fire and set the teakettle on. "More than twenty-four thousand—and the jug nearly empty," she muttered scornfully. "Dad was drinking too much, and he took advantage of him. And he said he had to give 'em a chance to win back their money! Twenty-four thousand isn't mere pastime—it's gambling, in any man's game!"

She had tossed a handful of coffee into the pot, and sliced bacon from a slab. It wasn't the amount her father had lost that angered the girl. She knew he could afford that; the discovery claim was paying out big, and getting richer as the shaft deepened. And her father had recorded the Number One claims both below and above. It was the thought that Bob Lowrie would take advantage of the older man when he was drinking. With the bacon sizzling in the pan she had mixed a batch of flapjacks.

Price had stepped from his bedroom carrying his pacs in his hand. Passing through the room he had seated himself upon the bench beside the smudge and drew them on. The girl heard a splashing and blowing at the wash bench, and a moment

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later he reappeared, his hair slicked down and neatly parted. With her back toward him she suppressed a smile. He was so palpably trying to please her.

"Mornin', Stella! Looks like we'd have a fine day. By gosh, if you ain't got breakfast ready!"

"It'll be ready in a minute," the girl had said, shoving a stick of wood into the stove.

"Where'd you set the jug, daughter? Guess I'll have jest a-tetch of licker. Sort of wakes a man up in the mornin'."

The girl had shot him a glance and jerked her thumb toward the corner behind the door. "I wouldn't go very heavy on it if I were you. There isn't much left—and it was half-full last night."

Price picked the jug up and shook it. "That's right," he admitted. "Well—there was three of us."

"Neither Bob Lowrie nor Tom drink very much," she said.

"Yeah, that's the trouble with chechakos. Some tries to drink it all, an' others don't drink hardly nothin'." He slopped an inch of liquor into a glass and filled it up with water. "Take a sourdough, an' he knows about what he can hold, an'—"

"And drinks about twice that much," the girl interrupted. "Your breath smells like a saloon, and your eyes look like two holes burnt in a blanket."

"We was up kinda late. I didn't git no hell of a lot of sleep. That whiff you got musta come out of the jug when I pulled the cork."

"How did you come out?" the girl had asked with a show of indifference. "Oh, not so bad. Bob's luck's runnin', an' we couldn't beat him no matter what we'd hold."

"I'd call twenty-four thousand pretty bad—for a friendly game," the girl said.

"Twenty-four thousan'! Oh—you mean them markers! Cripes, Sally, them markers wasn't all in last night's game! They run back a couple of months—ever sence Bob's luck started runnin'. I took 'em all up, last night—paid Bob off in dust." He had tossed off his drink and seated himself at the table. The girl had filled the coffee cups, slid some flapjacks onto the two plates and seated herself opposite.

"We should finish the clean-up in four or five days," she had said, as she poured syrup over the cakes.

"Yeah, but we don't need to kill ourselves. The boys figger they've got a week's work, yet. We can all go down together."

"That'll be fine," the girl had said. "I like the way Tom handles a canoe."

"Tom?"

"Yes, and he's a dandy dancer, too."

Old John had shot her a glance. "H-u-u-m. I figger Bob's the likeliest of them two."

"At least, he seems to be the best gambler."

"You got him wrong. He ain't no gambler. Cripes—he played 'em so loose, last night, that if his luck hadn't be'n runnin' he'd of lost his pants!"

V

"ALL aboard for Dawson!" cried a voice from the creek, one morning a week later.

Old John stepped to the door, dish towel in hand, to see the two from up the creek stepping out of their canoe. "We'll be ready in a minute," he called. "Figgered you'd be along today. We finished up yesterday. Trail pack's all ready—an' we're ra'rin' to go!" He appeared a few moments later, carrying a bedroll, which he placed in the empty canoe drawn up on the shingle beside the other.

The girl stepped from the cabin, duffle bag on her shoulders. The two men started for her, Lowrie slightly in advance. Duke, who had followed down the creek, romping along the foot trail, bounded past them and reared up to lick the girl's face.

"Down, Duke!" Lowrie called. "Here, Sally—give me that bag!"

With her free hand the girl was tugging playfully at the great dog's ear. Her eyes met Lowrie's. "Hello, Bob," she said. The words sounded coldly impersonal, and coldly impersonal was the glance of the violet eyes that met his eager ones. Bob Lowrie stopped in his tracks, a strange, sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach—as though he had been struck with a club.

Tom stepped past him and reached for the bag. "Thanks, Tom," the girl said, and relinquished the burden with a warm smile.

Old John fell in beside him as they followed the two to the creek. Tom had,

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shoved the canoe into the water and was holding it while the girl took her place in the bow. "Stella's going to ride here," he said. "And I'll bet ten ounces we'll be at the first night's camp ahead of you two!"

"I'll take that bet!" Old John said. "Whichever gits there first better make camp at the mouth of Willer Crick. The next night we'll camp at the high bank. That ort to put us in Dawson day after tomorrow evenin'." Bob Lowrie said nothing, as he took his place in Price's canoe. They shoved off with Duke prancing along the bank.

The three-day trip was uneventful enough. Low water made numerous portages necessary, and Price won his bet with a good hour to spare.

During those three days Bob Lowrie paddled in grim silence, broken only by a necessary word now and then. At the two night camps, he studiously avoided Sally who laughed and joked with Tom. Sensing the awkwardness of the situation, old John did what he could to relieve it by recounting anecdotes, humorous and tragic, of the days before the big stampede had filled the Yukon with chechakos.

MEN were pouring into Dawson from all the creeks. Stella managed to get a room in the hotel, but the others had to get along with a tent old John borrowed from Moosehide Charlie. The dance halls, the saloons, and the gambling houses were doing a rushing business. At the bars men talked of strikes, of new stampedes, and boasted of their clean-ups.

As the days passed, Stella Price was conscious of a growing uneasiness. Each evening Tom Cole called at the hotel and took her out. They made the rounds of the dance halls, and although the girl's eyes eagerly sought the faces of the dancers, not once did she see Bob Lowrie. This was more than she had bargained for. Bob Lowrie had snubbed her—that night at the door of the cabin. She had seen the light in his eyes—had rightly interpreted his halting words. She knew that he loved her—and her heart had leaped at the thought. She knew that had they gone for that walk, that night, he would have told her of that love—would have spoken the words she was so eager to hear. But instead he had deliberately passed up that walk for a stud game! That had angered her, even though she knew he had done the right thing—he had given Tom and her father a chance to win back their money. And deep down in her heart she did not actually believe that he had taken advantage of the fact that her father was drinking that night. It was only that, in her anger at being shunted aside for a stud game, she had tried to convince herself that he had. She had decided to show him that two could play at that game of snubbing. So, upon the morning they left for Dawson, she had deliberately snubbed him. And when Tom Cole had suggested, as they walked toward the creek, that she share the canoe with him, she had readily agreed. She'd show Bob Lowrie he could not pass her up for a stud game—no matter what the provocation.

But things hadn't worked out very well. She had expected that Bob would seek her out that night at the mouth of Willow Creek, and they would stroll away in the moonlight and everything would be all right. But Bob avoided her that night, and the next day he had resumed the bow seat in her father's canoe. And he had avoided her the next night—and ever since that night. Not once had she seen him since they reached Dawson. And neither Tom nor her father had mentioned him.

Tom took her to all the dances, and hung about to anticipate her slightest wish. She sensed, that he, too, loved her. And she was at her wits end to prevent him from telling her of his love. She liked Tom well enough, but she did not love him—knew that she could never love him. And she did love Bob Lowie—she admitted to herself that she loved him—that she was worrying herself sick about him.

A week had passed, and she was tired of Dawson. Despite the races, and the dances, and the big whoop-la, she had not had a good time. She wanted to go back—back to Moosehorn Creek—back to the claim.

TOWARD the middle of a hot afternoon she bought a magazine and drew a chair close to the window in the hotel lobby. Her fingers idly turned the pages, but her eyes were on the street, scanning the faces of the passersby. Her father stepped into the room and saw her.

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"Hello, Stella!" he called cheerily. "Havin' a good time? How are they comin'?"

"Oh, I'm all right."

"Tomorrow's the Fourth. Big day tomorrow. The Canucks thought they pulled off somethin' Dominion Day—but us Americans are goin' to show 'em how to celebrate! We'll need a day to sort of rest up after that—an' the next day we'll be pullin' fer home."

The girl nodded. "Have—have you seen Bob Lowrie?" she asked, with a show of disinterest.

"Not today I ain't. He's probably down to the tent sleepin'."

"Is he—drinking?"

Old John grinned. "Well, seein' there ain't no snow to eat, I s'pose he is."

Camillo Bill and Bettles came along, and old John joined them. The girl watched them until they disappeared through the doorway of the Tivoli Saloon.

That evening on the way to the dance she turned to Tom as they threaded their way among the people who thronged Front Street. "I wonder what's become of Bob?" she asked casually.

"Oh, he's around."

"I haven't seen him since we hit Dawson. I wondered if he's off on a spree."

"No. Bob don't go on sprees. He'll take a drink, now and then, but that's all."

"I haven't seen him at the dances."

"No. I guess he's playin' stud, mostly. They say his luck's still running. Someone said he cashed in forty thousand the other night, in a big game in the Tivoli."

They threaded their way through the crowd, and almost directly in front of the Tivoli, they met Bob Lowrie face to face. The girl's eyes lighted suddenly. "Hello, Bob! Aren't you comin' to the dance?"

She saw his eyes narrow slightly, then glance away. "No," he answered shortly. "I haven't got time." Then he turned abruptly away and entered the Tivoli Saloon.

VI

THE game in the Tivoli had run all night. When the sourdough played the stakes ran high, and only two men who sat in that game were not sourdoughs—Hake Ransome, a gambler, and Bob Lowrie. In the early morning hours old John Price sat facing Ransome across the board. The pot had been raised and reraised until all others had dropped out. Ransome dealt the last card face up, pairing a ten spot in Price's hand, and dealing himself the third exposed nine. He grinned across the table, and shoved ten yellow chips into the pot. "Ten thousand says I've got you beat."

Price regarded the three nines and the four spot in the other's hand, and glanced at his own pair of tens beside which lay a deuce and a six spot. "Bettles turned down a nine," he said, "an' you've got to have one of 'em to beat me. I'm callin' the bet. But I ain't got that much with me. I'm puttin' up a claim agin' that ten thousan'—Number One Below Discovery, on Moosehorn Crick. Is it a bet?"

It was common knowledge around Dawson that the Price holdings on Moorehorn were in the big money. Ransome nodded. "It's a bet," he said, and flipped over his hole card—a four spot.

"You have to have it," Price said, turning over the third ten. "An' that'll be enough fer me. My luck ain't runnin' tonight. Step over to the bar an' I'll make out the transfer. They've got blanks here."

The game broke up then. Price filled out the transfer, and shoving it to Ransome, turned to drink with Bettles and Moosehide Charlie who had ranged themselves beside him at the bar.

As the gambler pocketed the transfer Bob Lowrie accosted him. "That claim went in the pot for ten thousand," he said. "How about selling it to me? Here's ten thousand in dust."

Ransome grinned. "You playing me for a sucker?" he asked.

"Why, no. It's a straight business deal. You put up ten thousand against that claim and won. I'm just offering you the ten thousand for it, that's all. I figured that as long as you're not a mining man, maybe you'd rather have the dust than the claim itself."

"Listen, kid. I know all about you and your pardner—how you've got the only good claims on Moosehorn that ain't owned by old man Price and his daughter. I'd be a sucker to sell it. You know Moosehorn Crick, and you know that claim's worth more than ten thousand, or you wouldn't offer to buy it."

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"I'll double it then. How about twenty thousand?"

"Nope. If it's worth that to you it's sure as hell worth it to me."

"But you're not a miner. What are you going to do with it?"

"I'm not so old but what I can turn miner?" Ransome answered. "I'm only thirty, and I've looked around a little. Who are the big shots around this camp—the men with the heavy dust? They're the miners—not the gamblers."

"I'll give you thirty thousand for it, and not a damned cent more," Lowrie interrupted. "That's three times what you risked on it."

RANSOME hesitated, and old John Price who, with his back turned toward the two, had heard every word, turned abruptly. "Better sell it to him," he advised "Thirty thousan' is more than you'll ever take out of that claim, if you live to be a hundred."

"Oh, yeah? Listen, Price—I wasn't made in a minute. I've heard how Bob Lowrie and his pardner saved your life when they found you with your leg in a bear trap. And I know how a man would feel toward anyone that saved his life. If that claim wasn't worth more than he's offering for it you wouldn't be advising me to sell it to him. I'm keeping the claim—and I'm going to work it, too."

Price shrugged. "Have it your own way," he said. "It's your claim." He turned to the younger man. "Come on, Bob. We better slip down to the tent an' ketch us a little sleep. There'll be big doin's this afternoon, an' tonight—an' we don't want to be dead on our feet."

As the two walked toward the tent, pitched on the outskirts of the big camp, Bob spoke. "Why did you put up that claim against a ten thousand dollar bet?" he asked. "Cripes, I'd have shoved in the chips to call it. I'm better than fifty thousand ahead on this trip."

The older man grinned, and slanted him a glance. "The truth is, Bob, I'm well shet of that claim at ten thousan'. You know how it straddles them riffles jest below Discovery. Well, it's a hardrock dike runnin' crossways of the valley that makes them riffles. There ain't no more'n three, four foot of grave on top of it anywheres on that claim. It was the dike bein' there that makes our Discovery claim so good. Way back yonder when these cricks was formin', there must have be'n a big eddy behind that dike that prob'ly took thousands of years to fill up to the top of it. An' all them years the gold was pilin' in behind there along with the gravel. An' that's what makes your two claims good—they're in above a dike, too."

Bob Lowrie's brow drew into a frown. "It's no go," he said. "You're just tryin' to make the best of a bad bargain. I know you. And I know plenty of other sourdoughs. I know you're all square shooters. You wouldn't have put up a claim you knew to be worthless—even against a gambler."

The grin on old John's face widened. "Not agin' a square gambler, I wouldn't. But Hake Ransome ain't square. Twict last night I seen him make a crooked move—onct he second dealt in a pot that I wasn't in. An' that last four spot he dealt himself was on the bottom of the deck. I ketched a flash of it when I cut 'em. I wanted to call that bet to make shore he had a four in the hole an' wasn't runnin' no whizzer. I was almost shore he did have, er he wouldn't of dealt himself that four off the bottom. What I claim, a man's got to fight fire with fire."

"Still it don't jibe," persisted the younger man. "If you knew the claim was worthless, why did you advise him to sell it to me for thirty thousand in dust? You didn't see me making any crooked moves, did you?"

"No, son, I didn't. But I was watchin' Ransome's face in the mirror, an' when you boosted yer offer to thirty thousan' his eyes flickered, an' he kind of hesitated. I was afraid he'd take you up—an' I know'd damn well he wouldn't if I advised him to—so that's what I done."

VII

THE day after the Fourth Bob Lowrie bought a canoe, picked up Duke, who had been boarded with a man on the outskirts of Dawson, and hit out alone for Moosehorn Creek. "It's better this way," he told himself grimly, as he shoved up the Klondike, the huge husky sitting amidship. "It was kind of awkward for all of us—those two evenings in camp, coming down. If they get married, I'll sell out to Tom and

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move on. Funny I never tumbled that he was the one she really cared for."

Two days later he paused at the Price clearing and stared for a long time at the empty bench before the door of the cabin—the bench upon which he and Sally had sat beside the smudge—that evening he had almost told her that he loved her. Then he pushed on.

Tom Cole arrived at the claim the next day, and the two went about their work as usual. No mention was made of Stella Price, nor of the trip to Dawson. Each realized that it was a studied avoidance, and nerves tautened. Each evening Bob expected his partner to go off down the creek. But each evening after supper, Tom got down the cribbage board and they played their usual three games of cribbage, and went to bed.

Three weeks had passed, and then one afternoon old John Price appeared at the claim, rifle in hand. "Jest lookin' fer a little moose meat," he said, seating himself on the sluice box and mopping his brow with a huge red handkerchief. "I seen where a cow an' a calf an' a yearlin' crossed the crick a ways back. Well, how do you like our new neighbor?"

"Neighbor?" Bob asked. "Who do you mean?"

"Why, Hake Ransome. He come up, couple weeks ago. Fetched a carpenter, an' a couple of other fellas with him, an' they throw'd up a shack on the Number One Below claim. Pretty good shack fer the time it took to build it. They had it up in five days, an' the other three went back. Hake, he stayed on—be'n putterin' around with a pan an' a shovel in them riffles." The old man paused and grinned. "At the rate he's goin' it'll take him couple of years to find out that claim ain't no good. But I thought you'd saw him before this. Stella says she's saw him slippin' up the crick late in the evenin's, three, four times. When she told me that I figgered you'd be'n havin' a little game, an' I thought it was damn funny you didn't let me in on it."

"He hasn't been here," Tom said. "We didn't even know he was on the crick."

"Well, anyhow, we'll have a session of stud tonight. Hake was to my place when I started out, an' when he seen I was headin' up this way, he told me to tell you boys to come down to his shack tonight—sort of a house-warmin' party."

"Suits me," Tom said. "I didn't get in any stud in Dawson. Too busy taking Stella to dances. An' besides, I'd like to see if Bob's luck's still runnin'."

Bob Lowrie's lips tightened and he was astonished at the surge of anger that rose within him at the words, which he took as a deliberate taunt. If he'd lost Stella, his luck wasn't running, no matter how much he could win at cards!

"I'll give you a chance to find out," he snapped. "Tell Ransome we'll be there," he said to Price. Then, casually, he asked, "What was he doing at your place?"

"Oh, he hangs around there quite a bit—sort of buzzin' around Stella, looks like. Good-lookin' fella, Hake is—all rigged out in them new boots an' clothes. Hell—I'd hate to see Stella take up with a damn tin-horn like him. But you can't never tell about a woman. Cripes, he puts on gloves when he takes holt of a shovel to keep from gittin' callouses on his hands! Well, I'll be gittin' along—see you tonight."

BOB LOWRIE finished the day in grim silence. His anger dulled, and he tried to convince himself that Tom's words weren't intended as a taunt. If he had won Stella, why hadn't he been down to see her, instead of playing cribbage every evening? And now Hake Ransome had stepped into the picture.

He couldn't see Stella falling for a flashy tin-horn like Ransome. With Tom it was different.

At supper that evening he said, "What do you suppose Hake Ransome's been doing up the crick late in the evenings? He sure hasn't showed up here."

Tom shrugged. "How would I know? I didn't even know he was on the crick."

"I've got a hunch that maybe he's been laying in the brush trying to locate our cache. I told you never to go to it except at night."

The other emitted a snort that held more than a trace of a sneer. "You've sure got that cache on your mind, haven't you? I stand to lose just as much as you do if it was robbed. But I don't lie awake nights worrying about it. If Stella Price knows so much about Ransome's trips up the crick

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late in the evenings, it's probably because she was with him."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded Bob, his face flaming red.

Again Tom shrugged. "Well, you heard what old John said about Ransome buzzing around Stella half good-looking guy—all dressed up in brand-new clothes—no callouses on his hands. Looks to me like Ransome's doing pretty well for himself—even if that One Below claim isn't any good."

Bob Lowrie never did know exactly what happened in the next few minutes. The whole world seemed suddenly to swim red. He remembered the table overturning with a crash of dishes, he remembered striking again and again at Tom Cole's face. He remembered Tom fighting back. Then he was standing in the slow-gathering dusk looking down at the inert body that lay there on the floor. He had difficulty in seeing it clearly. Glancing into the little mirror he noticed that his right eye had swollen shut and was rapidly turning black.

Sudden panic seized him, and he knelt down beside the man on the floor. Thank God his heart was beating. A thin trickle of blood was oozing from the corner of his mouth, but a glance told that it came from a cut lip. It was a knockout—that's all. Tom would be all right when he came to. He picked the limp form up and laid it on the couch. Then he stood for a long time staring at the wreck of the room. Gradually, he realized the tenseness under which they had been living. He had suspected Tom of deliberately stealing Stella away from him. But he should have known better than that. Tom had not been down to see her once since the return from Dawson. And—if he had really cared for her he would never have hinted that she was having clandestine meetings up the creek with Hake Ransome, late in the evenings. Tom had no right to say a thing like that! Again Lowrie felt his anger rising. There had been something foul in the very way he had said it.

Hastily he began throwing things into his duffle bag. He would go away for a while—go down to Dawson and give himself time to cool off. Then, when his eye had cleared up he would come back. If Stella didn't love Tom, then maybe—maybe. . . . His thoughts were in a confused jumble. Ransome he dismissed altogether. Stella Price would never fall for him. Tom? Well, maybe they could patch things up. If not, one of them could buy the other out. They certainly couldn't go on like they had been—tense and suspicious—nerves stretched to the snapping point. Thank God, this had been only a fist fight! The man shuddered as he realized what might have happened—for well he knew that in his blind reasonless rage, he could have killed.

Abruptly he shouldered his duffle bag, crossed the little clearing and shoved off in the canoe. Duke frisked along the bank, but he sent the dog back. He passed the Price claim unseen, and a quarter of a mile below, glanced toward Ransome's new shack. He wondered vaguely whether old John had gone down there yet for the game.

Swiftly the light craft shot down the creek in the gathering darkness.

VIII

OLD JOHN PRICE lighted the lamp in the cabin, stepped to the door, and peered up the creek. "Wonder what's keepin' the boys?" he grumbled. "We was goin' to have a little game down to Ransome's tonight. I told 'em about it when I was up the crick today, an' they promised to come. But they'd ort to be'n here long ago."

Stella drew her chair closer to the light and went on with her knitting. "It does seem peculiar that Bob Lowrie would miss a stud game," she said dryly. "He seems to do pretty well at it—especially when the others are drinking."

Old John frowned. "Look here, Stella, you know damn well Bob wouldn't take no advantage of a man when he was drinkin'—with the cards, nor no other way. He plays a good game—watches the cards, uses his head—an' besides that, his luck's runnin'."

"Is it? I'm glad to hear it."

The old man slanted her a glance. "Damn if I can figger what's got into you lately. Bob Lowrie's as likely a young feller as I ever seen—fer a chechako. An' here you throw him over fer Tom Cole. An' now, by the looks of things, you've throw'd Tom over fer Hake Ransome—an' him nothin' but a damn tinhorn, the best you kin say fer him!" The man paused abruptly and both stared inquiringly toward the door from

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beyond which sounded a low vicious growl, followed by a shout—half anger, half fear.

"Get out! Go back—damn you! Take that!" The words were followed by a sharp yelp of pain, then a furious snarling growl, and a shrill cry of terror.

Price leaped for the door and threw it open just as Hake Ransome catapulted into the room with Duke, eyes blazing and white fangs bared, almost upon him. Price slammed the door against the dog, and turned to Ransome. "What's the trouble? What comes off out there?"

"It's that dog!" The man's voice sounded shrill and unnatural, and his face showed pasty white in the lamplight. "When you didn't show up I thought I'd slip over here and see what's the matter. And that dog—he—he—stood there growling something fierce, so I slammed a club at him, and then he came for me!"

"Yeah," agreed Price, "an' if I hadn't jerked the door open jest when I did, he'd of got you, too."

Ransome took a step toward the rifle that stood in the corner of the room. "Damn him! I'll fix him! A vicious brute like that has no business to be running loose!"

"Don't touch that gun!" The girl's words rang sharply, and the gambler paused. "Duke's the kindest, most intelligent husky I ever saw. If he don't like you there must be a reason."

Old John's brows drew into a frown. "What's Duke doin' here?" he said, more to himself than the others. He glanced at Ransome. "You didn't see nothin' of the boys out there, did you?"

"I didn't see anything of Cole. About an hour ago I saw Lowrie going hell-bent down the crick in a canoe. He looked mighty sharp at my shack when he went past, but I was inside and he didn't see me. I thought it was kind of funny because you said they both figured on coming down tonight for a game of stud. You don't suppose there's anything wrong, do you?"

Price was silent for a moment, then he nodded slowly. "Yeah," he replied, in a low, hard tone, "there might be somethin' wrong—damn good an' wrong." He glanced at the girl who sat, white-faced, her knitting idle in her lap. "Them boys was edgy before we went to Dawson. An' this afternoon I seen how their nerves was damn near the snappin' p'int. Mostly a trip like that does men good, but this one didn't—not with you playin' one agin' the other. That might be all right in a town, but it don't work on a crick—by a damn sight." He stood up and reached for his hat. "Come on, Ransome. We'll go up the crick."

The other drew back, his face going a shade paler. "Not me! I don't step out of this room as long as that damned dog is around here! Why, he'd—he'd eat a man up!"

Stella tossed her knitting onto the table, and leaped to her feet. "I'll go, Dad," she said with a scornful glance at Ransome. "I'm not afraid of Duke. Wait till I light the lantern."

As the two stepped outside the great husky reared up and with his paws on the girl's shoulders, licked her face. Then, uttering low, eager whines, he dashed halfway across the little clearing in the direction of the foot trail, halted, trotted back, then dashed away again.

"Go on, Duke! Go on, old fellow! We're coming!" Her voice sounded strained, high-pitched, as she struck off across the clearing. "Come on, Dad! Oh—hurry!"

DESPITE the darkness the two made good time on the foot trail, with Duke trotting on ahead, and the lantern light throwing weird shadows against the background of scrub spruce.

A low cry escaped the lips of the girl as she halted abruptly in front of the cabin. There, lying face downward before the door was an inert form—the body of Tom Cole. Duke, the hair along his spine aquiver, stood there sniffling, low growls rumbling deep down in his throat. Even before the two stooped to examine the man they knew that he was dead.

"We hadn't ort to touch him till the police gits here," Price said, "they'll want things left jest as they be."

Stella Price felt her knees grow suddenly weak, and a low moan escaped her. The police! Oh—dear God—Bob Lowrie killed Tom Cole—and the police would come—and they would arrest Bob—and—and—hang him—and it was all her fault!

"Stidy there, daughter—stidy girl," the soothing voice of her father reached her ears as from a great distance. She felt his strong

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arm around her waist. "You couldn't foresee this might happen. You're too young. You didn't realize how deep a man can feel—some men. Buck up, Stella, girl. What's done's done."

"He didn't do it! He didn't kill him! Oh, he didn't! He didn't!" The girl's voice was shrill, hysterical, as the words poured from her lips. But even as she uttered them she knew that they expressed a wild hope rather than a conviction. The lantern swayed in her hand as a huge form reared up. She felt the weight of the two great paws on her shoulders, and a soft red tongue licking her cheek. And suddenly she felt the warm blood coursing through her veins. The awful weakness was gone from her knees, and she felt strong. The mute action of Duke had accomplished what the voice of her father had failed to do.

The old man felt the stiffening of her muscles. "That's the girl," he said, taking the lantern from her hand. "We'll jest step inside an' see what things look like. We mustn't touch nothin'—jest look."

They stepped around the body and through the open doorway. The girl gasped at the scene of confusion—the overturned table, the dishes and the remnants of the supper strewn about the room, the spot of half-dry bood on the floor near the stove.

'Bob's duffle bag's gone," Price was saying—"an' his rifle."

"They had a fight!" cried the girl. "An awful fight—right here in the cabin! If Bob killed him it was in self-defense!"

Old John shook his head, and pointed to the rifle standing in the corner at the head of one of the bunks. "There's Tom's gun," he said. "It wasn't in his hands when—when he was killed. I believe he was shot. An' I couldn't see no weapon—like a knife er a club nearby, where he might of dropped it when he fell. The fight started in here, all right—but after it got out there, I'm afraid the police won't call it self-defense. Come on, daughter. We'll go back. There ain't nothin' we kin do here. The moon's high, now. I'll be hittin' fer Dawson to notify the police."

"Oh—do you have to get them—the police?"

"Why, shore, daughter—you know that. A man that runs onto a thing like this an' don't report it, is a criminal himself."

"Yes—I know. But—but—oh, it's all so—so horrible!"

"Yeah. Murder's a bad thing, anyways you look at it."

The girl's heart was like lead within her breast as she followed her father down the trail. That word "murder" had a terrible sound—a horrible, sinister sound. Her father's hobbed pacs clicked against the rocks, and behind her she could hear the soft padding of Duke's huge paws.

HAKE RANSOME had not gone home. He was waiting for them in the cabin. Nervously he laid aside the month-old newspaper, as the two stepped into the room.

"What did you find?" he asked hurriedly, wetting his lips with his tongue. "Anything wrong?"

"Plenty wrong," Price answered, shortly. "Tom Cole is dead. He was shot right in front of his door. Bob Lowrie has gone—so has his duffle bag, an' his rifle, an' the canoe." Even as he spoke, the old man was moving about the room, throwing a shirt, a couple of pairs of socks, and some grub into his duffle bag. Stepping to the corner he picked up his rifle. "Come on," he said, abruptly. "We'll be goin'."

"Going! Going where?"

"Why down to Dawson to notify the police, of course."

"I don't want to go down to Dawson. It only takes one to report a murder. You go ahead. I'll stay here."

"You'll come along," old John replied tersely, with an involuntary glance toward the girl.

Noting the glance, Ransome flushed slightly. "Oh, all right. I suppose two can make better time in a canoe. We might even overtake Lowrie."

"Yeah. We might. We can stop to your place if you want yer duffle bag."

As the older man stepped through the doorway the other drew back. "Damned if I'll go out there with that dog loose," he cried. "He hates me—an' he'd jump me, sure!"

"Why does he hate you?" asked the girl sharply.

"Why—why, because I hit him with that club, I suppose."

The girl nodded. "Yes, that must be it.

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Wait a minute and I'll chain Duke up." She slipped outside, and called to the dog who stood growling at the sound of the man's voice. Slipping a collar on him, she chained him to one of the posts in front of the winter dog shelter. "All right," she called, "you can come out now."

The man stepped out into the clearing, casting a half-fearful glance toward the toggled husky who strained against his chain, snarling fiercely at sight of him.

When the canoe disappeared around a bend of the creek, she slipped the collar off, and entered the cabin, taking the dog with her.

IX

CORPORAL DOWNEY, officer in command of the Dawson detachment, Northwest Mounted Police, glanced up from his desk as the two men stepped into the room. He smiled as his eyes met those of the old sourdough. "Hello, John! Back already, or ain't you gone home yet?" He nodded to Ransome as his glance took in the man's clothing. "First time I ever seen you rigged out like that. Goin' somewheres?"

"Going back to Moosehorn Crick—me and Price. I won a claim off him the Fourth, an' I'm up there workin' it."

Downey's smile widened. "You ain't worked it no hell of a lot," he said, his eyes on the man's hands, soft, white, and uncalloused.

"Fact is, Downey," old John said, "me an' Hake come down to report a killin'."

"A killing?"

"Yeah. Chechako name of Tom Cole. He's layin' dead in front of his cabin, an' his pardner, Bob Lowrie's gone."

Downey listened intently as the older man related what he and Stella had found on their trip up the creek.

"Any motive that you know of? Was their cache robbed?"

"I couldn't say. I don't know where they cached their dust. There'd ort to be quite a heft of it. They had a good proposition up there."

"They were bad friends," ventured Ransome. "It was on account of Stella Price. Lowrie passed my place heading hell bent down the crick, three, four hours before we started."

Downey glanced at the older man. "How about it, John?"

"Well, it looked to me like first off Stella kinda favored Bob Lowrie. Then seemed like she favored Tom. But sence we come back from the celebration she ain't seen neither one of 'em."

"Did you know there was bad blood between 'em?"

"W-e-e-l-l, seemed like their nerves were kinda edgy?"

The officer turned to Ransome. "You say this Lowrie only had three or four hours start of you two? You sure it was him you saw goin' down the crick?"

"Sure it was! It wasn't quite dark yet. I saw him plain."

"Funny you didn't overtake him. Two men can make better time than one in a canoe."

"Not the way the water is," said old John. "He could slide over shallows that we had to portage. An' besides Hake ain't no hell of a man with a paddle."

Downey called and a young constable stepped into the room and saluted smartly. "I want you to go out an' pick up a man named Bob Lowrie, if he's in Dawson. These men will go with you an' identify him. Constable McLean, meet John Price, an' Hake Ransome."

The constable smiled. "Glad to know you Mr. Price. I've heard the old timers speak of you. I know Hake here, by sight. And I know Bob Lowrie, too. Met him while he was down over Dominion Day. Fact is, I saw him not over an hour ago. He was just going into the Tivoli. You men won't need to go along. I'll be back in a few minutes."

The constable was as good as his word. Ten minutes later Bob Lowrie preceded him into the room. He glanced inquiringly at Price and Ransome and halted before Downey's desk. "Constable McLean says you want to see me," he said.

Downey, his mouth set in a stern, straight line, stared at the younger man without a word. Lowrie fidgeted slightly under the gaze of the cold, steel-blue eyes. His own gaze faltered and dropped. Downey's glance swept him from top to toe, and still he did not speak. Then suddenly his words cut hard and brittle as green ice. "Where'd you get that mouse?"

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"What?"

"That black eye—where'd you get it?"

"Why—in a fight. My pardner and I had a scrap—in our cabin—up on Moosehorn Crick. It didn't amount to anything."

"Didn't amount to anything!" Downey's voice was cold. "Maybe murder don't amount to anything where you come from. But here in the Yukon it amounts to quite a bit."

"Murder! What do you mean?"

"It's a name we use when one man kills another—unless he can show a damn good reason for doin' it."

EVERY bit of color drained from Bob Lowrie's face so that the black eye loomed blacker even than before. "What do you mean?" he repeated, and turned to old John Price. "What's he talking about?" the words fairly hurtled from between his lips.

"Meanin'," Downey said, "that your partner, Tom Cole, is layin' dead in front of the door of your cabin up there on Moosehorn Crick. You admit you an' him had a fight. You skipped out. What did you skip out for, if this fight you had didn't amount to anything?"

"Tom dead!" cried Lowrie, his eyes widening in horror. "And outside the cabin! The fight was inside. We fought with our fists. I knocked Tom out, and picked him up and laid him on his bunk. He was all right when I came away. He was still out—but his heart was beating regularly."

"What did you come away for, if he was all right?" Downey persisted.

The younger man hesitated as though at a loss for words. "I—I thought it would be better to—to get away from there for a while. To give us both a chance to sort of cool off a bit."

"Well—it looks like he's cooled, all right," said the officer dryly, and turned to Price. "Did you say Cole had be'n shot, John?"

"I don't know fer shore. I said I figgered he'd be'n shot. Me an' Stella didn't move him to see. We didn't touch nothin'. Everythin's jest like it was. He's layin' there on his belly, an' there's a blood spot on the back of his shirt around what looks like the hole where a bullet came out."

"Did you take your rifle with you when you left the cabin?" Downey asked, his eyes on Lowrie's face.

"Yes. I always take my rifle—matter of habit, I guess."

"Where is it?"

"In my room at the hotel."

Downey turned to McLean. "Go over and get it. Bring the rest of his stuff, too. You better check him out. He won't be needin' that room for a while."

"Do you mean," cried Bob, "that I'm under arrest for—for murdering Tom Cole?"

Downey's face was stern, and the eyes that fixed the speaker were cold. "Not yet, you ain't, but you're shore as hell under suspicion. I can't go up there myself. I'm sendin' McLean to investigate. You're goin' with him. If you did kill him, McLean'll find it out. If you didn't, you might be able to find out who did. It ain't exactly regular. You're on a sort of parole. But don't try to escape."

"I won't. And believe me, I'll never quit till I find out who killed my friend Tom Cole!"

McLean returned carrying Lowrie's rifle and his duffle bag. "You're goin' up to Moosehorn Crick with these folks," Downey said, "an' investigate this killin'. Price an' Ransome'll tell you what they've told me—all they know about the case. Circumstances, up to now, point to Lowrie as the killer. But there's prob'ly circumstances we don't know about yet. Lowrie's promised to do everything he can to help you. He's give his word that he won't try to escape. If he does, shoot him. That's all. You're startin' right now."

X

ALONE in the cabin on Moosehorn Creek, Stella Price spent a sleepless night. Over and over in her mind the words of her father repeated themselves—"you playin' one agin' the other—might work all right in a town, but it don't work on a crick—by a damn sight." Playing one against the other. Yes, she admitted to herself, she had done just that. And this is what had come of it! Poor Tom lying there dead! And Bob? Surely Bob Lowrie would never have killed him—would not deliberately have shot him down in front of the cabin in cold blood! But—if he hadn't killed him, why was he fleeing? Why had he gone

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paddling like mad down the creek just on the edge of dark?

Suddenly the girl sat bolt upright in bed, her eyes staring into the velvet blackness of the room. A cold nose nuzzled her blankets and she put out a hand to stroke the head of the great husky who stood close beside her bunk. Had Bob gone down the creek? They had only Hake Ransome's word for it. And Hake Ransome was nothing but a gambler—and a crooked gambler, at that. Why had Hake gone up the creek late in the evening—those times she had seen him? Why had he ignored the foot trail, and slipped past, hugging the rimrocks? She thought, of course, that he had been going up to the upper claim—but her father told her that very afternoon that neither Bob nor Tom even knew he was on the creek.

And why did Duke hate Hake? Duke, the kindest, most friendly husky she had ever known. She had asked Hake about that, and he had said he supposed it was because he had hit him with a club—but the hate went back of that. Hake wouldn't have hit a friendly dog with a club.

Wild thoughts crowded the girl's brain. Maybe Bob hadn't gone down the creek! Maybe he was lying dead somewhere up the creek! Maybe Hake Ransome had killed him and Tom both! Maybe Hake had been sneaking up the creek to locate their cache. Maybe he had located it. And maybe this evening he had slipped up there and killed both of them, and robbed their cache, and then come back down the creek, and made up the story of Bob's hasty flight in the canoe! And maybe Duke had witnessed the killings—and had followed Hake Ransome back down the creek! "Oh, Duke," she cried aloud, "if you could only talk!"

DAYLIGHT broke. The girl dressed, and bolted a hasty breakfast. She fed Duke, scribbled a hasty note, and left it on the table: "Gone moose hunting," it said. Then with the big husky at her heels she struck out up the creek. The wild thoughts of the night persisted as she covered the three miles of familiar foot trail. If Ransome had killed the two, robbed their cache, and reached the dust, he might kill her father also. He had not wanted to go down to Dawson. He had only submitted with what grace he could when her father insisted—made it plain that he wouldn't trust him alone on the creek with her. Her father had a rifle. Hake was unarmed—but that very fact would tend to make the older man careless. And there were a dozen ways one person could kill another on the trail, and no man could say it was not an accident. If he did that he would do it soon—today. Maybe he had already done it—so there would be more time for a getaway with the gold. With no one to report the killing, it would be a long time before the police would find out about it, and he could be far away. The girl's mouth hardened. "If he shows up alone," she said to Duke, "I'll—I'll shoot him!"

The hair at the back of the girl's skull tingled at sight of the dead man lying there, and she glanced fearfully about her. A woodpecker tapped loudly on a dead stub, and she started nervously. Duke whimpered and stalked about stiff-legged, the hair on his back standing on end. Getting hold of herself, Stella dropped to her knees beside the body and examined the bloodstained hole in the back of the man's shirt. Gingerly she inserted a finger and drew it out back in terror as it encountered the wound where a bullet had passed through. The torn flesh felt firm and cold—like raw moose meat.

She rose to her feet, stepped into the cabin, and for a long time busied herself, taking care to disturb nothing. She stepped out into the clearing and called to Duke, who came romping up to her. "Where's Bob?" she said. "Go find Bob!" The big dog jumped and frisked about, uttering short yelps of delight. Here was a game he knew. Often she and Bob had played with him thus. One would hide, and the other would send Duke to find the hidden one—and he never failed. His nose always carried him unerringly to the quarry. And it was the same hidden objects—an old shoe, a discarded glove. No matter where they hid it, the dog would nose it out. "Go on, Duke! Find Bob!" The dog circled the clearing, nose to the ground. He sniffed in the cabin, then ran aimlessly around, but always wound up at the canoe landing where he would stand, gazing off down the creek, whining eagerly.

The girl's heart sank. Then Bob *had* gone away in the canoe. She had feared as much when she first stepped into the clearing and found the canoe gone. Suddenly her

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eyes brightened. Even if Bob had gone to the canoe—that didn't necessarily mean that he had fled in it! He might have been dragged to it. Whoever killed Tom might have killed Bob, too—and dragged his body to the canoe! She would look around. Maybe the body, or the canoe, or both were lying somewhere in the bush back from the creek, where the murderer had hidden them.

Calling to Duke, she stepped from the clearing and began circling it, walking slowly, peering into every thicket, in ever-widening circles. Then, almost against the rimwall, Duke began to sniff and whimper excitedly, running about wagging his plumed tail.

"What is it, Duke?" the girl cried. "Go find it, Duke! Go get it!" The huge dog circled about nose to the ground, then ran back and forth along the rimwall. Suddenly he halted, scratching frantically at a rock fragment and emitting short sharp yelps of delight.

The girl reached him and shoving him away dropped to her knees and tugged at the stone. It came away, revealing a cavity in the rocks and in the cavity were numerous little moosehide sacks, heavy with dust. A scrap of paper slipped beneath the tie string of the topmost sack caught her eye. She snatched it up and read the words scribbled in Bob Lowrie's handwriting. "The dust in this cache, twenty-four thousand one hundred and sixty dollars worth is the property of Stella Price."

For long moments the girl remained there on her knees, staring at that little scrap of paper. Twenty-four thousand one hundred and sixty dollars! Why—that was the exact total of her father's losses! Bob had cached it for her! Another thought flashed into her mind—if Bob had killed Tom Cole, he would never have fled leaving all that dust in his cache! If he had been trying to escape, he knew he could never come back—would never see her again—and the cached dust would never do her any good! No—he would have taken it with him—would have taken that and the contents of the partnership cache, too! Whoever killed Cole might have, and probably did, rob the partnership cache—but didn't know of this one! She thought of Ransome's surreptitious trips up the creek in the evenings—just at the time the partners could be expected to visit their cache to deposit the day's clean-up.

"He did it! He killed Tom! I know he did!" she cried aloud. Then she replaced the stone, and turned back toward the clearing. But—why had Bob gone away? Maybe he had witnessed the murder, and had gone for the police—but no! If he had, he'd have either killed Ransome, or taken him prisoner—he'd never have left him on the creek! She would go down to Ransome's shack and see if she could find anything there that might help—maybe he had hidden the dust from the partnership cache in his cabin! It would be a fool thing to do—but Ransome was a chechako, and most chechakos were fools. Anyway, it would do no harm to find out.

BACK down the foot trail she went, the dog at her heels. Stopping at her own cabin for a hasty lunch, she pushed on to Ransome's. The door opened to her touch and she stepped inside. For an hour she searched the place, leaving not a square inch of it unexplored, even to examining the edges of each floor punchion to see if any of them had been pried up.

Duke refused to enter the cabin. He stood outside and emitted low rumbling growls of hate. An idea struck the girl as she stepped from the room, and she turned back, picked up a shoe, and held it toward the dog. He sniffed at it and redoubled his growling, his eyes dark with hate. Replacing the shoe where she got it, she called to the dog, and led the way toward the rimwall along which she had seen Ransome slipping up the creek. Who knows, she thought—he may have recached the dust along the wall! "Go get him, Duke!" she said. "Go find Ransome!" Nose to the ground the dog continued to growl, and struck off up the creek. Stella followed. There was no trail here, and the going was difficult, circling thickets, and threading between rock fragments that had broken from the wall and crashed into the valley.

The dog kept on and on, growling now and then, nose to the ground. After a long time the trail slanted toward the creek and came out in the clearing before the boys' cabin, and straight to a point not ten feet from where the dead man lay. Duke paused and growled, then led off toward the rim-

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wall on a slant that took them up the creek from the cabin. Again he paused, sniffing and growling at the base of the rockwall, and upon reaching him the girl saw that he was sniffing at an empty hole—a hole that had evidently been a cache. The rock fragment that had covered it, was lying close beside the aperture. But Duke did not stop there—already he was continuing on up the valley, following the wall. Several hundred yards farther on the dog stopped again—and again he began to claw and emit short yelps of eagerness. Her heart beating wildly the girl dropped to her knees and pulled a loose rock fragment that had been carefully wedged into an aperture of the rocks. It gave way, and once again she was staring down at numerous little moosehide sacks stuffed to bursting with dust—the sacks from the partnership cache! There could be no doubt about those sacks. She knew them every one. She had made them for the partners out of a smoke-tanned hide they had bought from an Indian. But what held her attention even more than the sacks was an object that lay on top of the sacks—a long-barreled, blue-black revolver. Lifting it, the girl threw it open. The cylinder contained five loaded .38 caliber cartridges and one empty one. Carefully she returned the gun to its place, and replaced the stone. "Oh, Duke, Duke!" she cried, and throwing her arms about the huge dog's neck, buried her face in his long deep hair and burst into a torrent of tears.

Dusk settled over the valley as the girl made her way down the foot trail. The disappearance of Bob Lowrie still troubled her. But, she knew, that that night she could sleep.

She went to bed early, the big husky curled up close beside her bunk.

ARISING at daybreak next morning she packed a lunch and with a book and the magazines she had bought in Dawson in a light packsack struck off up the trail. Selecting a spot in a thicket of young spruce, at a point-blank range of thirty yards, she trimmed away the branches so as to give her a clear view of the cache containing the re-cached dust and the revolver. Arranging a comfortable seat, with her rifle within easy reach of her hand, and Duke curled up beside her, she adjusted her head net against attack by flies and mosquitoes, and with gloved hands opened a magazine.

Day after day from early daylight to dusk she repeated the routine, leaving the moose-hunting note on the table so when her father returned he would not worry at her absence from the cabin. She read through all the magazines she had brought up from Dawson, and reread Samuel Butler's "The Way of All Flesh."

Then, late in the afternoon of the fifth day of her vigil, she heard voices in the direction of Bob Lowrie's cabin. Picking up her rifle, she slipped stealthily through the brush and from the shelter of a scrub spruce on the edge of the clearing, saw four men standing there looking down at the body—her father, Bob Lowrie, Hake Ransome, and a man in the uniform of the Northwest Mounted Police. Then she stepped out into the clearing.

X

PRICE was the first to see her. "Hello, daughter!" he called. "We found yer note on the table. Have any luck?"

Bob Lowrie took an involuntary step toward her as she approached across the little clearing. "Stella!" he cried, a note of horror in his voice. "You don't believe I—I—did this!"

Constable McLean was waving her back. "Better not come any closer, sister," he advised. "This body's in pretty bad shape. We'll take it out of the way as soon as I have a look at it."

The girl came on. "I can stand it, if you men can," she said, and ranged herself beside the other three as the officer dropped to his knees and cut away the shirt to examine the wound. Then he turned the body onto its back and cut away the shirt in front. "He was shot, all right," he said. "The bullet went through his heart, I'd say, from the looks."

He turned to Price. "Fetch a blanket and we'll roll him up in it and carry him over there downwind. We'll bury him later."

When the body had been removed and some fresh earth shoveled over the spot where it had laid, McLean turned to Lowrie. "You say you had a cache. Let's go take a look at it and give this breeze a chance to

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kind of clear the air around here before we look around the cabin."

Bob led the way and the others followed. A few moments later all stood looking down at the empty hole at the base of the rock wall. "There it is," he said. "The last time I looked into this hole there was close to fifty thousand dollars in dust in it."

"Of course," Ransome suggested, "a man could rob himself along with his pardner."

Lowrie whirled on him. "What do you mean by that?"

The gambler shrugged. "Well—no one knew about this cache but you and Cole—and he didn't make any get-away. It wasn't dark yet when you passed my place that night, Lowrie. I saw you plain. Fifty thousand in dust weighs right around two hundred pounds, and it don't take up much room. You were seated well back towards the stern—but your canoe was riding level—and no load showing above the gunnel."

"I put rocks in the bow so she'd handle. I always do on a downstream run."

Constable McLean frowned. "That was a pretty big game you were sitting in there in the Tivoli, when I went there to get you."

"My luck was running, and I banked right around fifty thousand in the Tivoli safe on the day after the Fourth."

Hake Ransome snickered, "How much did you have to pay Curly Bronson to say that's when you banked it in his safe?"

Bob Lowrie lunged at the speaker with doubled fists: "Damn you! I'll——"

McLean grabbed his arm. "You'll stick out your hands while I get these onto you," he said. "I know a way to make Curly Bronson talk, and if I find out that your fifty thousand was deposited in his safe the day I picked you up there, your luck won't be running quite so good. I've got evidence enough to hold you on, Lowrie—what with Price admitting that you and Cole weren't getting on any too well, and you admitting you had a fight with Cole. Men don't pull out after a fist fight, Lowrie. They do after a murder. Then there's the fact that you and Cole were the only ones that knew where this cache was located—and Ransome seeing you hitting hell-bent down the crick, with a level canoe and no load showing above the gunnel. And Price claiming that you and Cole had told him only a few hours before that you'd be down to Ransome's for a game that evening. Something changed your mind mighty sudden, Lowrie—and it'll be hard to convince a jury it was nothing but a fist fight. I'm arresting you for the murder of Tom Cole, and it's my duty to warn you that anything you say may be used against you."

"I didn't kill him," Lowrie said, his face pale as he stared down at the handcuffs McLean had clicked onto his wrists. "He was alive when I left the shack. I wasn't making any get-away. I merely went to Dawson, figuring to stay there a few days till we both had a chance to get hold of ourselves. If you can use that against me—go ahead and use it."

They returned to the cabin. "You're not denying that you had your rifle in your hand when you left this cabin, are you?" McLean asked.

"No. I had my rifle. But I didn't shoot Tom Cole."

Stella Price who had been a silent listener to all that had been said, now turned to McLean. "The bullet that killed Tom went on through him," she said. "Why don't you find it?"

"Find it!"

"Sure. Tom came to after Bob left and he was shot as he was standing directly in front of the door. The bullet that passed

through his body must have gone on into the cabin. If it still had force enough it would be lodged somewhere in the logs of the back wall. If it didn't it would be on the floor. Why don't you see if it corresponds with the bullets in Bob's rifle?"

"That wouldn't prove anything!" Ransome exclaimed hastily. "He might have used a revolver."

"Yes," the girl agreed, speaking very slowly, her eyes on the gambler's face. "A thirty-eight revolver, for instance. It might even have been a pearl-handled Colt."

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The man's eyes flickered. "What do you mean?" he asked, quickly.

The girl laughed. "I mean that of the five people here, only two of us know who killed Tom Cole."

"Two of us know who killed him!" McLean exclaimed, eyeing the girl sharply. "Which two?"

Deliberately she pointed to herself, then to the gambler. "We two know who did it—don't we, Ransome?"

"I know who did it—sure! And McLean knows—he just arrested Lowrie for it, didn't he? And you bet, Lowrie knows! He ought to! He shot him!"

"Oh no, he didn't. And he didn't have the dust out of that cache in his canoe when he went down the crick—and you know that, too."

"What are you talking about?" Ransome demanded, his voice sounding high-pitched—shrill—so that the eyes of the others focused upon his face.

"You know all about it," the girl replied in a hard, level voice, "because you shot Tom Cole, and robbed the cache *after* Bob went down the crick, that evening."

"You lie!"

"Oh, no, I don't." Stella turned to McLean. "Keep that man covered. Because if he gets away, you've lost a murderer. Come on, I'll show you that bullet that killed Tom Cole. I found it five days ago."

She stepped into the cabin and McLean turned to Price before following her in. "Keep Ransome covered," he ordered. "If he makes a break, shoot him. We've got to clear this thing up."

STEPPING to the rear wall, the girl pointed to a slug barely imbedded in a log.

"There's your bullet," she said. "I didn't disturb it. But you can see it was never fired out of Bob's rifle."

McLean pried the bullet out with his belt knife, and held it in the palm of his hand. "That's right," he admitted. "This is a thirty-eight—a revolver bullet, I judge." He turned his attention to the room—the overturned table with the scattered dishes littering the floor. He stooped and examined a dark stain on a floor puncheon. Then stepped to the bed and examined the blanket and pillow. Slowly he nodded his head. "It could have been just like Lowrie said—a fist fight here in the cabin. He knocked Cole out, and then found that his lip was bleeding. That would account for that bloodstain there on the floor. Then he said he picked him up and laid him on his bunk. This bunk's evidently Cole's—Lowrie took his blankets with him. Here's a smooch of blood on the pillow that prob'ly came from his cut lip." He paused and a frown deepened upon his brow. "It's just as much the duty of a policeman, Miss Stella, to clear an innocent man, as it is to convict a guilty one. What I see here seems to check with Lowrie's story. But nothing here proves that Lowrie couldn't have had a revolver as well as his rifle. And there's nothing that connects Ransome with this murder. Nothing, that is," he added after a short pause, "except that he seems mighty anxious to make things look bad for Lowrie—and since you started talking he's got mighty nervous. But that isn't evidence you can take before a jury."

The girl smiled into the officer's face. "All right, I'll show you something else, then—evidence you *can* take before a jury. I'll show you where Ransome recached that fifty thousand in dust—and his pearl-handled revolver along with it."

STEPPING from the cabin, she led the way diagonally up the valley. The others followed, McLean walking directly behind Ransome, his service revolver ready to hand. At the cache, he again turned the man over to Price, who cocked his rifle, and eyed the gambler grimly. Ransome's nervousness was now apparent to all.

He mopped sweat from his forehead, and kept continually moistening his lips with his tongue.

At the foot of the rock wall Stella halted and pointed to a rock fragment. "Here's Ransome's cache," she said. "The cache with Bob's and Tom's dust in it—the cache I've been guarding during every minute of daylight since I found it, the day after Dad and Ransome went down to notify the police."

Dropping to his knees, McLean removed the stone, revealing the stack of little moosehide sacks with the blue-black pearl-handled revolver resting on top of them.

"It's a lie! A damn lie!" shrilled the

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gambler, his face livid. "She's framing me to save Lowrie! I never saw that cache before! I never saw that revolver!"

"Never owned it, eh?" asked the girl.

"No, I never owned it! It—nor any other gun! I don't even own a rifle!"

McLean threw the gun open and examined the bullets in the loaded cartridges in the cylinder. He compared them with the bullet he had pried out of the wall. Then he removed the single empty shell and fitted the butt end of the flattened bullet to the brass case. "It's the same," he said.

"Yes," the girl answered, "and these cartridges are the same as a half-empty box of cartridges, you'll find in the inside pocket of a coat that's hanging behind the door in Ransome's cabin." She glanced at the gambler. "If you never owned a gun, why did you have those cartridges?"

"Damn you!" screamed the man, beside himself with terror. "What right did you have to break into my cabin and go through my stuff?"

"I didn't break in. The door wasn't locked, and I walked in. As to my right—I had the right of a woman that wants to see justice done—the right of any woman to save her man from being framed by a dirty thieving murderer!"

At the words Bob Lowrie started toward her, his manacled hands outstretched. "Stella," he cried, his eyes alight, "you—you said 'her man'!"

Constable McLean's lips twitched in a smile. He stepped to Bob's side, a key in his hand. "Maybe I can help," he said, unlocking the cuffs. "It seems I made a mistake. I've got a better place for these." Turning his back, he snapped the cuffs on Ransome's wrists, as Bob Lowrie's arms closed about the girl.

"Well, I'll be damned," old John Price said, uncocking his rifle.

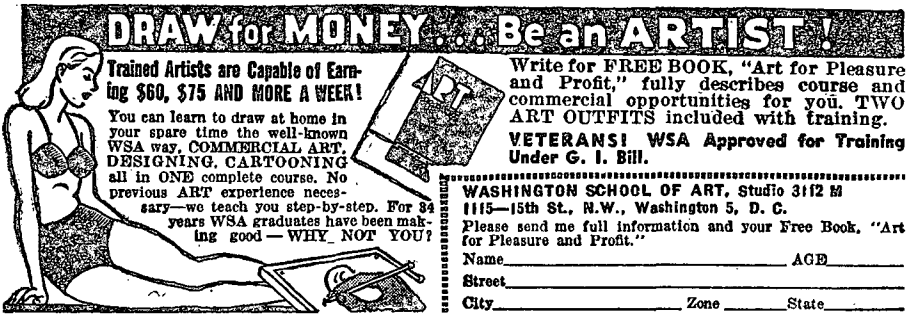
McLEAN regarded his new prisoner with a hard gleam in his eyes. "But I haven't made any mistake, this time," he said. "When I was examining that empty shell I took out of your gun, I noticed the firing-pin dent in the cap. It's a dent that every policeman in the Yukon has been carrying around in his head for six months—a dent with a flattened side—the same dent that's on the cap of an empty shell in Corporal Downey's desk—a shell that was found beside the body of a chechako that was murdered and robbed one night in back of the Tivoli Saloon in Dawson. You didn't throw out your empty, this time, Ransome—maybe it would have been better if you had." He turned to the girl, who was standing close beside Bob Lowrie, smiling happily up into his face. "The credit for cracking this case goes to you, Miss Stella."

The girl laughed and pointed to the huge husky who was nuzzling Bob's hand. "Not to me—to Duke," she said. "I knew he hated Ransome, and I had a hunch that it was Ransome who killed poor Tom Cole, so when I was down at his cabin I let Duke smell one of his shoes, and started him off on Ransome's trail. I was afraid the trail would be too cold—but it wasn't. Duke followed it straight to the spot where Ransome stood when he shot Tom, then to the empty cache, and then on to this one."

McLean's smile widened. "You're a better policeman than I am," he said. "You ought to join the Force."

"Not by a long shot!" Bob Lowrie cried. "She's got something else to do!"

"Okay, Bob," the constable said. "And if you ask me—you're luck's still running."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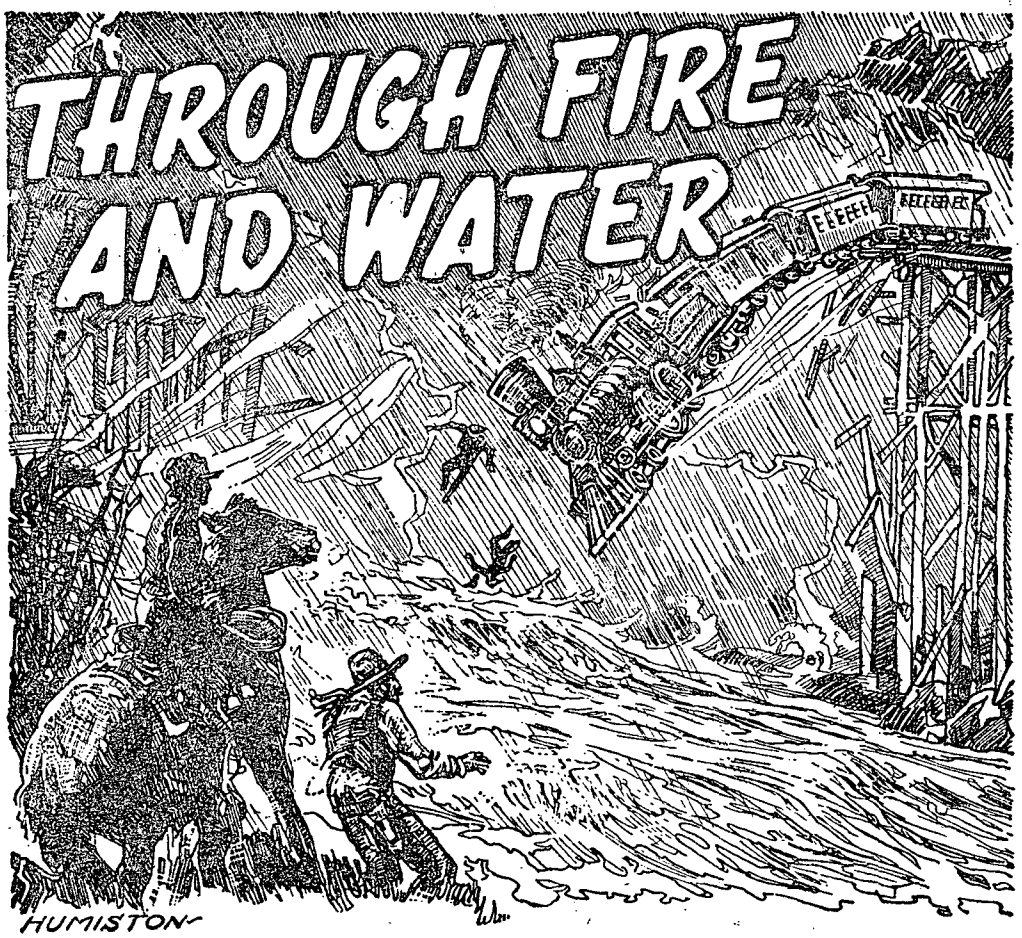
". . . . This Feudin' and Fussin'—It's All Plumb Foolishness!"



By WILLIAM MacLEOD RAINE

IT HAD BEEN raining for days, not a fine drizzle but a soaking downpour that left the brush heavy with moisture and the ground soggy with the seepage. Bob Harshaw was traveling through the chaparral instead of following the road because the feud had broken out again and the price of life was wariness.

He was wearing a heavy slicker but below and above it the plumed huisache brushed against his legs and face scattering drenching showers. A small branch ran across his path, its water pouring turbulently down to Dead Woman Creek. His horse waded this after making dainty pretenses of being afraid.

Rising ground brought young Harshaw to the summit of a spur from which he could look down into a valley beyond more sparsely sown with brush. Back of it were the tops of cowbacked hills huddled together like the waves of a sea. A moving object caught his eye. A cow perhaps, or possibly a coyote. But as it moved into the open he could see that it was neither. It was a human being, apparently in distress, dragging along with difficulty. He weaved forward weakly, then dropped beside a mesquite.

This was no trap, but somebody who desperately needed help. Bob turned Blacky down the slope and rode across the spine-covered plain at a canter. The figure rose and moved toward him, hands outstretched, staggering dizzily. As he swung from the

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saddle he was startled to find she was a woman, in boots and levis, young and haggard from exhaustion.

"I've been lost all day and night," she told him with a sob.

Fortunately she was wearing a slicker that had kept her from being completely soaked. From his saddlebags he took a sandwich and gave it to her, after which he lifted her to the seat on the horse he had just left. The first thing was to get her to shelter where he could build a fire and get the chill out of her body. He knew of a dobe cabin, scarcely a mile distant, kept furnished with fuel and food for line riders.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

He told her, adding an explanation. "I'll get you warm as toast and feed you hot coffee and food."

Her body drooped in the saddle, but she made no complaint. "A rattler scared my pony and it threw me," she said. "I couldn't catch it, and I got all mixed up in the hills."

Her face was streaked with tears and grimy from the desert dirt. Shadows under the eyes showed exhaustion.

"If you hadn't come along—" she began, shuddered, and left the sentence in the air.

"But I did," he answered cheerfully. "Soon you will be glad you had the experience." But he was not so sure of that. She might be in for a bad attack of pneumonia.

At the cabin he lifted her from the saddle. He made note that though she was slender and not over tall the flesh on her body was solid.

The hut had a cot, a table, homemade chairs, and a cupboard fashioned from a dry goods box. In a couple of minutes he had a fire going in the stove. From the bed he stripped a blanket.

"Take off your wet clothes and wrap in this," he ordered, and put one of the chairs before the stove. "Call me as soon as you are ready. Just leave your clothes on the floor. We'll take care of them later."

He flung his slicker over his shoulders and went out into the rain. She did not know how far she could trust him, but his voice was matter of fact and she liked his face. And there was nothing else to do but what he had told her.

A small voice called to him presently. She was sitting huddled by the roaring fire well wrapped by the blanket. Only her head and bare toes showed. It was a comfort to her that his eyes passed over her with no interest to the shelf of food.

"We'll do fine," he told her. "Coffee, flour, bacon, sugar."

He stoked the fire and set about preparing a meal. She watched the economy of effort with which he did this. Presently he grinned at her, with the cowboy camp cook's "Come and get it." She did not have to take that literally. He pushed the table close, filled her tin cup and plate, then drew up a chair for himself. She ate ravenously but daintily.

"I'll never forget how good you have been to me," she said. "My name is Jessie Seeley."

He thought at once, *I ought to have guessed it.* She must be the daughter of Judge Hannibal Seeley, the leader of the whole clanjamfry of sons, cousins, nephews, and in-laws that made up the enemy faction. He had known the judge had a daughter Jessie, but she had been away at school for years. Not since she was a little tike had he seen her. The Seeleys and the Harshaws did not meet socially.

Th girl waited for him to mention his name. When he did he was not entirely candid. They had to spend the night together in this cabin and it would be better not to alarm her. "Robert Carroll," he told her. It was true as far as it went. Carroll was his middle name.

"Getting warm and comfortable?" he asked.

"I'm feeling fine, but awf'ly tired," she answered.

"Better turn in and have a round the clock sleep," he said casually. "I'll have a Tucson bed before the fire."

He gathered up her wet clothes from the floor to hang on the wood box beside the stove.

"I'll take care of those," she told him sharply.

Bob dropped them on a chair. "They'll dry out nicely before morning," he replied. "We'll have to hope it won't still be raining then."

He went out to unsaddle the horse and picket it while she prepared for bed. Before he came in again he called out, "Ready?"

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The "Yes" that came back to him was not very sure.

When he went back into the cabin his attention was centered on getting out of his slicker. "Rain letting up a bit," he said, not looking toward the cot. "May clear up before morning."

Covertly she studied him. There was strength in the dark tanned sardonic face. She had never seen a man move with such light and easy grace. The coordination of his muscles was fascinating. Something of the same rippling smoothness she had observed beneath the skin of a sauntering panther. She thought, *I'd better keep awake*, and was sound asleep in a matter of minutes.

Bob was wrong about the morning. It was still raining hard.

At breakfast he said, "Where were you heading for?"

"Torreyville," she answered. "I live there. My father will be awf'ly worried."

The Harshaw clan traded at Sun Up, the Seeleys at Torreyville. This was a tacit understanding, in order to avoid too many meetings, though the Seeleys, usually in small groups, went to the county seat to transact necessary business.

"I'll set you on the road so that you can't miss it," he promised.

He saw now that she was a lovely young creature, gay and spirited. There were silver bells in her throat when she laughed. But the pleasure he took in her was negatived by the fact that in a couple of hours she would go her way and he his and they would never again meet in friendship. A month earlier he had killed her cousin, Nick Dailey.

SHE rode behind him, her arms around his waist. Near the outskirts of Torreyville he stopped.

"I'm afraid I can't go any farther," he said.

She slid from the back of the horse. Perhaps he wanted to save her the embarrassment of riding in behind him, she thought.

"I wish you would come in and let my father thank you for all you have done for me," she said impetuously.

"Not today, I think," he declined.

His eyes had drifted from her and were on two men riding past them on the way from town. They were Tom Dixon and Bill Ray, both of the Seeley clan.

"Judas Priest, it's Bob Harshaw," one of them yelped.

Jessie was startled but rallied instantly to her rescuer's defense. "He found me almost dead on the desert. He saved me, fed me, and brought me home."

She knew now why he did not want to go into the town. There would be a dozen of his enemies there. He was one of the Harshaws she had been brought up to hate, and she knew she could never hate him again. He had killed her cousin Nick Dailey, but Nick had been a drunken ne'er-do-well always in a brawl. This man might be wild and untamed, but that did not mean that he was bad. She was sure he was not. That swift smile of his, friendly and winning, was better than a letter of recommendation.

The one he turned on his two enemies now was neither friendly nor winning.

"Too bad you can't gun me here," he mocked.

He had them at a disadvantage. They could not do that, unless he started trouble, not as long as Jessie Seeley was beside him. They were second cousins of the girl, poor relations, and they were used to treat her with much respect. But they did not intend to let him get out of their sight until she was gone.

"You had better leave us, Cousin Jessie," Dixon suggested.

"I'm not going to leave you," she said with sharp decision. "Mr.—Harshaw, if that's his name—is going with me to see my father."

"All right," Dixon agreed sulkily. "Have it your way."

They fell in behind Harshaw and the girl, keeping a distance of about twenty-five yards.

Harshaw turned his sardonic smile on the girl as they walked down the road leading the horse.

"So you've changed my mind for me," he drawled.

"Yes. It is best. My father will see you get safely out of town."

BOB was aware that the rumor of his presence was running along the street. His shifting glance picked up unfriendly faces. Two men stood in the doorway of a

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livery stable, Ric Seeley and Dave Hart. Farther down the street he saw two riders in chaps dismounting in front of a saloon. Both were from the Seeley ranch Circle S. Soon they would be closing in on him.

"I'll not trouble your father, Miss Seeley," Harshaw said. There was a touch of derision in his drawling voice. "He and I don't think at all alike about some things."

The girl's troubled gaze swept up and down the street, took in the small knots of men watching them. "I've brought you into a trap," she told him. "There's no way out, except with my father's help. Don't be—stubborn, please." He could see fear staring out of her eyes.

They had reached the courthouse square. Harshaw thought fast. Sheriff Brazel might be in his office. He was a good officer. It might be possible to cut across the lawn to the courthouse through the gunfire and surrender to him. Not too good a chance, for even if he made it alive Brazel could be out on business. But anything was better than crawling to Hannibal Seeley for help.

"I'll be saying adios, Miss Seeley," the cornered man replied.

"What are you going to do?" she cried.

He did not answer. His eyes were on a man who had just come out of a building and was moving toward them, a large man in his fifties, handsome and impressive, wearing a well-made black Prince Albert coat.

"Father," Jessie exclaimed, and took a step or two to meet him.

"I thought you were at Sun Up with your Aunt Jane," he answered, then recognized her companion and stood stiff as a ramrod.

Her explanation poured out swiftly. "I started home day before yesterday and got lost. It was horrible—for a whole day and night. I think I would have died soon, but Mr. Harshaw found me, took me to a line cabin, fed and looked after me, then brought me here." The girl's voice broke. "They are going to kill him."

Hannibal Seeley bitterly resented this situation, but it was laid in his lap. Just now the anger of all his clan group centered on this young Harshaw for killing Nick Dailey. He could see four or five of them in the offing waiting for a chance at him, and he could not let them have it. The service the fellow had done his daughter barred any attack.

He tugged at his imperial. "If this is true I shall arrange to see that Mr. Harshaw gets out of town safely," he said, his voice harsh and his manner implacably hostile. "You may go home at once, Jessie."

Bob Harshaw's smile was both ironic and scornful. "I'll not trouble you, Judge. I will take care of myself."

He bowed formally to the girl, turned suddenly, and raced across the lawn for the doorway of the courthouse. For an instant his enemies were taken by surprise, then the guns crashed. He ran like a deer, took the steps three at a time, and disappeared inside the building. Not a bullet had struck him.

Unannounced he walked into the office of the sheriff, then locked the door behind him. Sheriff Brazel was an oldtime cowman and Indian fighter with gray steel-chilled eyes. He was wearing a corduroy suit that had never been pressed, a low-crowned black hat, and good custom-made boots. His face was darkly tanned and the back of his neck patterned by deep wrinkles. Though a friend of Bob's father, he had taken no part in the feud.

"What in time you doing here?" he asked.

"I'm giving myself up for killing Dailey."

"Took you a heck of a long time," Brazel grunted.

"I made up my mind only three minutes ago."

"Since that shooting began?"

"About sixty seconds before that."

The sheriff had been standing at the window looking out when Bob entered. "Quite a gang of Seeleys around, I notice," he said. "Looks like they'll be headin' this way."

"I wouldn't wonder." There was a faint gleam of mirth in the young man's eyes. "So I dump myself on you. I'm your prisoner."

"If you're my prisoner hand over that six-shooter."

"I'm not sure I'm that much of a prisoner. The gents outside have intentions."

"Which will have to be postponed *if you are my prisoner.*"

"Meaning that I can't have it both ways—still pack a gun and be in your charge."

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"Correct. Make up yore mind which."

Bob unbuckled his belt and handed it to the sheriff.

Somebody tried the door, found it locked, and then rapped on a panel. Brazel turned the key and flung the door open. Judge Seeley stood there and back of him his nephew Ric Seeley and Dave Hart.

The judge said suavely, ignoring Harshaw, "I came to explain the shooting, Sheriff."

Brazel's thick body blocked the doorway. "Did you bring these two young men with you to help explain it, Judge?"

"I brought them to be reprimanded if you think it necessary, Brazel. They are hotheaded young fools, and when they saw the man who killed their cousin they could not restrain their anger. I am against the lawlessness that goes with a feud like this. It is time we used our common sense."

Harshaw thought the judge was being honest. It was exactly how his father felt. Those who kept the old hostility alive were the young men when they were inflamed with liquor or when they felt the urge to answer one wrong with another.

Young Seeley asked hotly, "Do we have to let this fellow go free after he killed our cousin?"

"He isn't going free," Brazel answered. "He has surrendered and is my prisoner. He will be tried and if found guilty will be punished."

"That will be satisfactory to us," the judge agreed. "All we ask is justice."

"And to make sure he is hanged," the nephew added vindictively.

THE jail was in the basement of the courthouse. To it the sheriff led his prisoner and locked him in a cell. After all it was the safest place in town that could be found for him.

The rain had stopped falling by the time the sheriff brought Bob his dinner, but the clouds in the hill country were still dark and lowering. The sheriff was worried about the heavy long-continued downpour. All the creeks in the uplands were emptying their contents into the Castlewood reservoir and there was some fear the dam might give way. If so, Torreyville would be in the path of the descending flood.

Bob Harshaw lay down on the cot and smoked. He judged that he was still in danger. When word reached the ranches of the Seeley group that he was in jail it was a fair bet that the young men would ride in to town, do quite a bit of drinking, and work themselves up to storm the jail. If they tried they might not succeed. Brazel was a fighter and would protect his prisoner as long as he could. Meeting Tom Dixon and Bill Ray had been bad luck. They had barred the chance of a retreat. It would have been better to have dropped Jessie Seeley two or three miles out of town and let her walk in, but he had not liked to do that.

Bob was not a man to worry overmuch. Recklessness was in his blood. It had pounded through his veins from youth and driven him along rough trails. In a district torn by a bitter and once bloody feud, a son of one of the leaders, he had been put on a spot from which there was no easy escape. The fight with Nick Dailey had been forced on him when he met at a cross-roads store that young man with two companions, all of them drunk. The storekeeper and his wife could bear witness he had done his best to avoid trouble. But they might never have a chance to testify.

YOUNG HARSHAW slept for an hour and awakened to the discovery of a disturbing excitement in the town. His first thought was that the Seeleys had already started making trouble. He looked through the barred window and saw the street was a river of rushing water and the courthouse yard already flooded. Somebody called out that the dam had burst. From adjoining cells prisoners were shouting frantically, demanding that they be freed before they were drowned.

He heard cell doors being opened. Presently Brazel unlocked his.

"I've got to get you out of here, Harshaw," the sheriff said. "All this lower part of town will be ten feet under water soon. Get a move on you. This building is too ramshackle to trust."

The other four prisoners were in for minor offenses. Brazel had more important work on hand than guarding them.

"Look out for yourselves, boys," he told them. "After this is over you can report back to me."

They waded through two feet of water

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and started for the higher land of the residential section. A broad strong current was already pouring a flood across their path.

"Do I go free too, sheriff?" Harshaw asked after they had reached the shallows.

"Yes. I have nobody to guard you. I'll be seeing you later."

A running man shouted at the sheriff. "Looks like the railroad bridge may go out."

Brazel turned to Harshaw. "The local passenger train will be along in a few minutes. It must be stopped. Get across the bridge and give warning." He added anxiously, "For God's sake, hurry."

A saddled horse was tied to a hitch rack a few feet from them. Bob flung himself into the saddle and raced for the river. He heard the roar of the rushing water while he was still a hundred yards away. The Bijou was a leaping pouncing monster bank full and appallingly wild. Before he reached it the bridge collapsed. Its timbers raced downstream tossed high by the current.

He was on the wrong side of the stream to flag the train. Between him and it was the river, scarcely a dozen yards wide but too swift to swim. He heard the shriek of the engine's whistle. A few moments later it plunged over the edge dragging two cars after it and leaving a third perched precariously on the bank.

Passengers were trapped in the coaches and others struggled in the boiling waters. A girl's scream came to him. She was clinging to a jammed timber.

FROM his waist Bob unbuckled the heavy belt and from his feet dragged the high-heeled cowboys boots. Fortunately his mount was a cow pony. The loop of the lariat he fastened under his armpits, the other end to the saddle horn. As he dived into the stream he saw that the girl had been swept from the anchored tie and was being carried down by the current. With powerful reaching strokes he drove forward fighting a pressure that was like a moving wall. The girl disappeared in the tossing billows. He thought her gone, but her body plowed into his. His fingers tightened on her arm. Together they were swung by a taut rope into a comparative eddy back of a projection of the bank. He caught at a half submerged young willow tree and somehow dragged himself and her out of the water.

She lay with closed eyes, whether dead or alive he did not know, nor did he have time now to find out. A man's head showed in the turbid waves. He went under, but presently came up again, one arm beating feebly to escape the current. His other arm was around a child.

Again Harshaw dived. Wreckage was tossed on the surface like chips. A bit of driftwood smashed into him and swung him half way around. But he was still strong. The erratic current flung him in the path of the man. He took the child, and as before the clutch of the undertow carried him to the end of the rope and into the less furious water behind the promontory.

The girl had come back to life. She crawled toward him and took the child from his arms. Harshaw kicked his foot against the bank and headed into the stream a third time.

The man was going down when he reached him. He could do little to help himself. To get him ashore was a long hard struggle. Bob was very tired. He felt he was not making much headway. But he set his teeth and came at last to the willow. The man got a grip on it while he pulled himself out, helped by the girl. Together they dragged the man to land. He lay on the ground completely exhausted. It was nearly a minute before he could gasp out a question about his little boy.

"He's a little sick, but he'll be all right," the girl said.

Harshaw, very tired, looked at her. She was about seventeen, and in her wet clothes she seemed as slinky as a drowned kitten. He could see she was fighting against hysteria.

"You saved us all," she sobbed.

Bob nodded at the horse, still standing with its front feet braced, as it had learned to do at the end of a tight rope after a calf had been thrown. "Thank that sorrel," he told her. "If it hadn't been a cow-pony we would never have made it."

With leaden feet the rescued man walked across the few yards that separated him from his son. He took the little boy in his arms, an anguished look on his face. Not till later did Harshaw know that three of the family had been on the train and that the wife had been killed in the crash.

Two men came running to the river

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from the direction of the town. They were Ric Seeley and Dave Hart.

Seeley stared at the girl. "General Jackson!" he exclaimed. "Were you on that train, Cousin Willie May?"

"Yes. This gentleman saved us—all three of us. He dragged us out of the river. I thought—I thought—" The girl choked up, flung back for a moment into the terror of the experience she had been through.

Hart and Seeley were taken aback. They did not know how to meet this situation. A few hours earlier they had been flinging bullets at the man who had just rescued their young relative.

"Look!" The little boy was on his feet pointing across the river. "In the tree."

A small girl, almost a baby, was clinging to the slender branch of a tree on the opposite bank. She was sitting in the fork, not far above the tumbling water. It was plain that she had been washed there into momentary safety and that she might any moment lose her balance and fall.

"It's little Emmy Lou Rawlins," cried Willie May. "She was on the train with a nurse. Why doesn't somebody see her?"

The level of the high watermark had passed its peak, but the noise of the flood evidently drowned the wail of the child. Men were busy helping others out of the car that still hung suspended on the broken bridge.

Harshaw loosened the rope from his body. "I'll get her down," he said, unsteady on his own feet.

Ric Seeley put a hand on his chest and pushed him back against a tree. "Stay where you're at," he said roughly. "My job."

Seeley was a powerful man, heavyset and muscular. He flung off his superfluous clothes and plunged into the stream. A fine swimmer, he fought forward against the current. A bridge pile upended in the torrent and crashed down on his leg. It carried him under, but presently his head appeared a dozen yards farther down and close to the opposite bank. His fingers closed on the trunk of a young plum tree and he pulled himself out of the water. Dragging one leg, he moved up the river toward the child.

"Don't you move, honey," he called to her. "Be with you in a minute."

Emmy Lou stopped sobbing and watched him climb the tree. He edged out carefully on the branch below the crotch where she sat. It was light for his weight and he moved gingerly.

"Hold out yore hand, Sugar—carefully," he told her.

He gripped her arm below the shoulder and edged back toward the trunk. He slid down, Emmy Lou in one arm.

A brakeman caught sight of them and approached. "I'll be doggoned," he said. "Where did you come from, brother?"

"Take care of the kid," Seeley said.

"What's the matter with yore leg?"

"A log busted it while I was crossing the river."

"Goddlemighty, did you swim it?"

"Did you think I jumped it?" Seeley snapped. He was concerned because he had broken his leg. Yet a deep satisfaction ran through his surface irritation. This grandstander Harshaw had taken the wind out out of their sails. They could not do a thing to him now, but he had the pleasure of showing him that a Seeley could jump in a river too if the occasion called for it.

THE water in the river receded almost as rapidly as it had risen. It had fallen half a foot below the high line by the time buggies and surreys arrived to take the rescued and one of the rescuers back to town. Seeley spent the night in one of the railroad coaches.

Bob Harshaw slept till noon next day. He was awakened by the clump of boots coming down the hall of the hotel. They stopped at his door. In answer to a knock he said drowsily, "Come in."

His father entered. Clint Harshaw was a big man with iron-gray hair, cleanshaven. He had a strong bronzed face from which deep blue eyes looked with almost harsh directness.

"Son, you've been throwin' a long shadow, I hear," he said.

"Out of one tight into another," Bob answered, grinning at him.

"I reckon I ought to be thankful you're still alive. But it has worked out fine. Judge Seeley and I met an hour ago and had a talk. We have agreed that this feudin' and fussin' is plumb foolishness. As of today there won't be any more of it. You boys can hang up yore guns. I'm mighty glad of it. Fact is, both the judge and I would

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have liked to call it off long ago, but when you wild young devils got in a jam we had to back you."

"That suits me. I get scared when I'm shot at, especially when three or four are poppin' at me simultaneous."

"Too bad you haven't got yore Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes with you, son. You are due to meet two right pretty young ladies who want to say thanks. So hop into yore duds."

"Now look here, Dad, I don't want any thanks," Bob protested hotly. "Lord's sake, I just happened to be the Johnny-on-the-spot and I'm not going to listen to a lot of mush about it."

There was a glint of mirth in Clint's eyes. "Go take yore medicine, boy. You can't go swimming with young ladies and then act offish with them." He added, seriously, "You're responsible for this peace we've patched up and you can't walk out on us."

Bob knew this was true. He could not offend the Seeleys by refusing to accept this overture. Moreover, back of his reluctance was an urgent desire to see Jessie again.

The matter of clothes disturbed him. "I look like a scare-crow," he said. "I lost my hat in the river and everything I have is still wet and muddy."

"We'll buy you a new outfit and a barber will pretty you up." Clint looked at his watch. "You got just an hour and ten minutes before your appointment at the judge's house, so you better get a wiggle on you."

"You're going with me?"

"No, sir. You're going alone."

MRS. SEELEY met Bob graciously. She was younger than her husband, still pretty, with a gift for putting people at ease. While they were talking of the flood Jessie and Willie May came into the parlor.

"It is hardly necessary to introduce you to my daughter and my niece after what you did for them, Mr. Harshaw," she said. "We are all deeply grateful. It is not possible to tell you how much."

Bob was embarrassed but pleased. "I'm right glad I was around," he answered. "Though of course anybody would have helped. It was nothing."

Jessie said, in a low-pitched husky voice, "Willie May and I can't agree with you about its being nothing, though of course we may not be very important."

The young man flushed. "You know I didn't mean it that way, Miss Jessie. I meant—"

He bogged down and Mrs. Seeley helped him out. "We know what you mean, Mr. Harshaw. But the fact is that you not only saved our girls' lives but put an end to this silly feud that has made us so unhappy. There is something else I want to say. We don't blame you for what happened to Nick. We know you were not at fault."

Bob was relieved that she understood he had tried to avoid trouble with Nick. His gaze shifted to her daughter. He hoped that she too was clear on that. Jessie was dark-eyed and spirited, clean of line as a young race horse. The cheek modeled by the firm jaw had the tint of a peach just coming to ripeness. He thought her the loveliest girl he had ever seen. In that moment he made up his mind that if he could bring it about she would some day be his wife.

Dave Hart walked into the room. After greeting the women he turned to Harshaw. "We been lookin' for you, fellow," he said, and added with a grin, "Not like yesterday—guns is out and the feud busted for keeps."

Bob answered, "I'm glad."

"Seems you've got the rep of being a top hand at bronco bustin'. We got a plumb wild bunch of outlaws in a corral. Come along and show yore stuff."

That this was an offer of friendship Bob knew. The past was to be forgotten. He looked at Mrs. Seeley for permission to leave.

She nodded her head, smiling at him. "Don't let us stop you from breaking a bone or two."

The two young men left the room together. Jessie's gaze followed one of them. There was in her eyes an eager and shining light.

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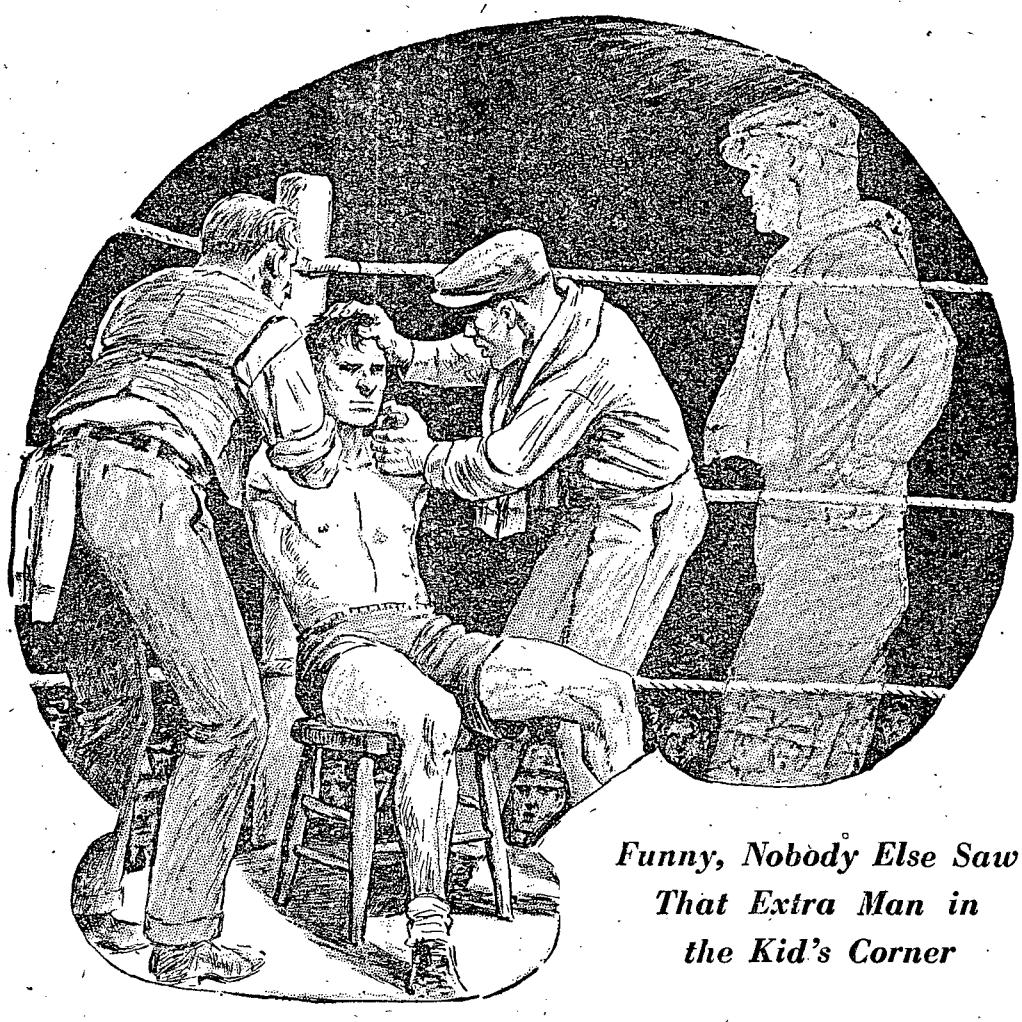

Funny, Nobody Else Saw That Extra Man in the Kid's Corner

THE THIRD HANDLER

By JACK KARNEY

Author of "The Kid's First Fight," etc.

IT'S six in the evening and you're in bed trying to grab a nap but you can't sleep. Thoughts crowd your head and no matter how you try, you can't lose the picture of the Champ, big and brown and unbeatable, and you feel sweat break out all over you, a terrifying sweat that turns you sick. You've never been scared before; a fight was between you and another guy and the worst that could happen was that you could be beaten unconscious for ten seconds. All you had in front of you was one guy, the same weight and height, one guy with little red gloves on his hands. . . .

But it was different then. Now things have changed.

You roll out of bed and pace the floor in your bare feet, that strange lost feeling sweeping over you. You begin to dress and as you dress you avoid looking at the framed picture on the dresser and the more you try not to look, the clearer those pictures become. Finally, as if to prove something to yourself, you shift your gaze up. Pop looks good in his blue strips with the

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R.D. in the left-hand corner, lean and strong and fearless. Rocky Dolan the first. Whoever dreamed at that time that there'd be a Rocky Dolan the second?

The other picture is Pop in his captain's uniform. You see the gray temples, the thin layer of callus over the eyes, the thick scarred lips. You stare at Pop's picture and there's a curious ache tight in your throat. You remember his words. "The night you box the Champ, Rocky, I'll be in your corner. Me and you, Rocky, we'll bring the Dolans a title."

And suddenly you're sore at Pop, a crazy savage anger that makes you shout, "Where the hell are you? Why in hell did you have to get yourself killed? You said you'd be with me tonight. You didn't keep your word."

You laugh at your idiocy; you laugh because you're ashamed; you laugh to cover up your infantile panic.

You go out into the kitchen and Mom looks at you, her gray eyes searching. You see the wrinkles appear on her forehead and you know you carry your fear like a banner across your face and you hope Pop, wherever he is, can't see you now.

Mom says, "Be careful, Jimmy." Everybody calls you Rocky but to Mom there was only one Rocky.

You slip an arm around her thin shoulders. You want to be funny. Pop was always funny, always kidding. You say, "Sure I'll be careful. Even if I have to force myself. . . ."

She smiles but there's no humor in her eyes.

Mom says, "I'm sorry Dad isn't here tonight. He'd be proud of you."

You laugh and shake your head and laugh louder. It's so damn funny. Proud of what? And when Mom looks startled you turn on your heel, grab your hat and coat and go outside to wait for Whitey, your trainer. It's dark now and the night is cool and soft. You pace the stoop front and wonder what the devil is taking Whitey so long.

ROCKY DOLAN the first made his debut in the prizefight ring the year women's skirts ran down to hide the patent leather shoes with the contrasting buckskin top. Before the year was over Rocky Dolan sold his T Ford and bought himself a Templar. That night he and Martha Dolan went to see Mary Pickford in "Daddy Long Legs." The next morning Jimmy was born. The year was 1919.

Rocky fought his last fight seven years later. It was the night Lindbergh was on his way to Paris. It was in the Yankee Stadium and Jimmy was there to see the bowed heads as the crowd said a prayer for The Flying Fool and his Spirit of St. Louis. He was there to cheer with the others as the Champ and his Pop came through the ropes. The Champ's body was white and rugged, his hair cut short. That same year the Champ was destined to lose his crown to an ex-marine, but that night he was invincible.

Joe Humphreys, the derby tilted back on his head, raised his hands for silence, then he announced the weights, his clear, strong voice carrying throughout the park as if he were using a microphone.

"Rocky Dolan . . . . 195 and—" His expressive hand cut a diagonal through the air and the crowd chanted, "three-quarters." Humphries said, "The champ, 197 and—" His palm ran parallel to the stained canvas and the crowd shrieked, "one-half."

In the sixth round Rocky Dolan traded punches with the Champ. The Champ bobbed and weaved, exploded his hands. Rocky went down, coming up at nine only to be dropped again by a barrage of leather. Rocky's eyes were cut, the blood running down to his chin. The sweat and blood and dirt covered his face like a horrible mask. He made one last futile attempt to beat the Champ off. For a brief heartwarming period it looked as if the Champ would go down, then suddenly Rocky was tired. His breathing was ragged, uneven. When he went down again, his body quivered sickeningly.

Jimmy had heard of athletes who cried on losing a race or a game and he'd always snickered at their weakness. But when, in the dressing room, he saw the tears in Pop's eyes, he couldn't control his sobs. After a while it was quiet, an oppressive silence that was heavy as a ton of lead. His mouth distorted by exhaustion, Pop lay on the table, Uncle Charlie working on the cuts. Charlie wasn't really Jimmy's uncle but continuous fifty-cent gifts by the tall,

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kindly-eyed man had earned him the title.

Uncle Charlie finally spoke. His voice was low and soothing. "This is it, Rocky, the turning point. Right here and now you got to decide whether or not you pack away your gloves."

Pop grumbled deep in his throat. His face was tensed and pale. "Match me again with the Champ. Next time I'll beat his brains out."

Uncle Charlie shook his head. "The Champ is going on a tour of Europe. After the summer he's matched for another fight, his last for the year. You're getting older, Rocky. You can do one of two things. You can keep fighting second and third raters and make more money. Or you can retire. You got enough money to live on comfortably and you've still got your health. The choice is yours."

Rocky Dolan stared at the floor, his face gray under the bruises.

After a while he spoke, "I don't need any more money. All I want is the name Rocky Dolan on a Championship belt."

Uncle Charlie said, "It just wasn't in the cards, Rocky."

Rocky made a helpless gesture with his arms and shoulders. "That's that, I guess." He reached out, pulled Jimmy toward him, wiped away the boy's tears with his thick fingers.

Uncle Charlie said, "Maybe Jimmy can do what his old man couldn't. Maybe—"

Everybody laughed. Jimmy was so thin his mother always wondered if he'd ever add any weight to his seventy pounds.

FOR the tenth time you take a turn around the dressing room and you move your arms to loosen the muscles and you pound a bandaged fist against a palm as if you're anxious to get into the ring and tear into the Chocolate Baby. But in your heart you wish the fight were a million miles away.

Uncle Charlie, thinner and taller and a lot grayer says, "Sit down, Rocky, you're knocking yourself out."

You don't answer him. You just walk and walk and roll your shoulders. This will be your third fight without Pop in your corner. In the other two you were lucky to get the decision. The other two were bums. The Champ is quality. . . .

Whitey pleads, "Rocky, you don't need any warm up. You're hot and ready to go—"

"Lay off me. For God's sake, get outside and leave me alone," you holler and Whitey doesn't get mad. He knows you don't really mean it.

Uncle Charlie's eyes grow soft, dreamy, and he says, "The night your old man boxed the Champ, he was on edge. Couldn't even look at him without him explodin'."

A MAN sticks his head into the doorway. "You're on, Dolan."

All of a sudden your mouth is dry. You pull the faded blue bathrobe—Pop's lucky robe—around you and the crowd cheers as you run your feet through the rosin. The air is cool, almost cold, and you feel your blood thicken and tingle. Things move fast now. Introductions, announcements, instructions all blending into the bell's ring. The Champ moves out slowly, waits for you in the center of the ring, cool and dangerous, and that strange lost feeling is back again.

It started innocently enough. Even Mom used to laugh when Rocky Dolan got down on his knees so Jimmy could swing at his bobbing head with his bony fists. Later, Rocky taught him how to put his body behind a left jab, how to hook and cross, how to roll away from a punch or step inside to let it ride around his neck. Rocky showed him how to get up on his toes, move in and out, feinting for an opening.

When Jimmy won the Greenwich House 110-pound amateur fights, Rocky was proud and boastful.

"What do you expect?" he said to Mom. "The kid has my blood in him."

A flicker of unease passed over Mom's face. "I hope he's smarter than his father," she said, in a jesting tone, "and gets himself a respectable job."

Then came the Golden Gloves 126-pound open class. It was Rocky who gave Jimmy twenty-five cents for his amateur card and entered Jimmy in the Daily News contest.

Her eyes disturbed, Mom said, "But, Rocky, he's only a boy."

"They're all kids," Rocky said. "It's only amateur stuff. And I'll bet he cops it too. The kid can handle himself and don't you forget it."

Mom said, "Next year Jimmy graduates

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high school. When he goes to college he won't have time for fights."

Rocky scratched his head, looked away. "Next year," he said.

After winning three fights, Jimmy lost the fourth and was eliminated. For the next few months there was no talk of boxing in the Dolan residence. In July Jimmy obtained his professional license. He came home waving the paper in the air.

"I'm a pro, Mom," he cried. "Just like Pop."

Mom stared at him. Her lips began to quiver and there was a sickness in her eyes. She bit her lip to keep it still and looked at Rocky.

Rocky smiled disarmingly, "A couple fights won't hurt the kid."

She sat down, cold and shaken. "No, Rocky, I won't have it. I don't want Jimmy to go through the same rotten grind as his father."

Rocky said dully, "I liked the game. So does Jimmy."

She shook her head angrily. "There was reason for you becoming a prizefighter; you needed money, for you, for your mother, for us. There's no reason for Jimmy dirtying his hands. He doesn't belong in the game, Rocky."

Jimmy said, "Only a couple fights, Mom. . . ."

She turned on him. "You could get the same fights in the amateurs boxing young boys like yourself. Rocky, why did you do this?"

They stared at each other then Rocky said gently, "I was hoping maybe Rocky Dolan's name would get on the Muldoon trophy."

Jimmy showed her the paper. "See, Mom, Rocky Dolan, that's my pro name."

Rocky said, "Anytime Jimmy wants to quit, I'll tear up that license. . . ."

DOWN on your hands and knees you count the blood spots on the dirty canvas and as fast as you count, new red dimes splatter like tears before your eyes. You look up at the referee waving a finger in your face and the scarlet runs into your left eye, blinding you. You push yourself up. The brown man comes out of the neutral corner. You see his left jump but his right comes around your blind spot. You grab a rope to keep from falling. The Champ measures you. You don't see it, you feel it. You bob and weave. A cry comes up from inside you as you fall again. There's a funny ring in your head, like a clock spring whirring. Somehow you're up before the ten count. You don't remember doing it but you're on your feet facing the Champ. You stab with your left, pump inside with your right. Suddenly the Champ turns on his heel and you wonder where he's going. Whitey and Charlie take you back to your corner. The sixth round is over.

The years slipped by quickly. Four rounders, then six, then an eight round semi-final at St. Nicholas Arena. Jimmy won and lost in monotonous succession. Then suddenly he seemed to find himself. He won six in a row and on his twentieth birthday fought his first ten round fight in Madison Square Garden. It was one of three such ten-rounders but fighting in the Garden meant big-time. He was on his way.

"From now on," Rocky said, his eyes on the scales, "every win is important. Two more fights under your belt and I'll swing a fight with the Sailor."

Jimmy grinned. "Which means I've put on a couple more pounds."

"One sixty-eight," Rocky said, "A full-fledged light-heavy."

The fight with the Sailor was at the Garden, a ten round affair that went the distance. For six rounds the Sailor and Jimmy traded punches, then abruptly in the seventh round, Jimmy avoided slugging. Instead he got up on his toes, jabbed and hooked with his left, his right pressed tightly against his hip. He went on to win the decision while the crowd booed his change in tactics; they'd paid to see blood and thunder. There was nothing Jimmy could do, for in the sixth round he'd broken his right hand on the Sailor's hard head.

Rocky fumed and fretted. The intolerable waiting for Jimmy's hand to mend swelled and mushroomed inside him until he was a hard man to talk to. But Rocky was too ring-wise to rush Jimmy back into action. For six months the boy didn't step inside a ring. He did roadwork to help keep his weight down and after the cast was removed, he did light calisthenics. Four months after he'd broken his hand

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Jimmy began serious training, shadow-boxing, rope skipping, light bag punching, everything but boxing. Little by little he sweated off his excess poundage but when he was ready for gloved action he weighed 190 pounds.

Rocky Dolan cried, "Five, six pounds of fat, that's all you got." Excitement quickened his voice. "Jimmy, you're ready for the heavy boys, and you can take them."

At the Coliseum in Chicago, Jimmy knocked out Lou Lager who'd been decisioned by the Champ. In the Bowl, Jimmy won two fights in succession by knockouts. Back in New York he was matched with Barney Foster, the winner to meet the Champ in a June fight.

Rocky said, "Two more fights, Jimmy, that's all. Beat Foster, then the Champ.... Then we're going to take Mom's advice and quit the game."

Jimmy stared at Rocky. "Why do I have to quit? I like the game. Just because I become Champ is no reason to quit, is it?"

Little lines appeared around Rocky's eyes. "You've taken a lot of punches to the head and body in the few years you're in this racket. That's all right. You're young and can take it. When you get older those punches hurt more. They do more damage. I don't want you walking around on your heels and talking like you got marbles in your mouth."

Jimmy grinned confidently. "Don't worry about it, Pop. I can take care of myself; I'll know when to quit."

Rocky opened his lips to say something, closed them. Nervously, he ran a hand through his graying hair. Abruptly, he said: "Maybe you do and maybe you don't. Let's talk about it after you lick the Champ in June."

Jimmy didn't meet the Champ in June. Two weeks after he knocked out Barney Foster in the fourth round of a thriller, Jimmy received his induction papers. Seven months later, literally on a San Francisco dock waiting to board a transport for Hawaii, Jimmy received orders to report to Fort Benning. When he stepped off the plane the first person to meet him was Rocky Dolan in a captain's uniform. Jimmy stared in amazement.

Rocky's eyes were clear and direct. "The Champ is in the Army too. He's going to give exhibitions in different training centers. He'll be in good shape when this war is over, in better shape than a guy ducking bullets. If you're ever going to get Rocky Dolan's name in the record books as Champion of the World, you'll have to stay in one piece. . . ."

Jimmy said coldly, "So you pulled strings and had me transferred to this training center. Pop, did it ever occur to you that maybe I wanted to go over with my friends?"

Rocky said, "You got a hero complex; it'll wear off."

Jimmy shook his head angrily. "I got friends going over, guys I like, guys I should be with. If I'm supposed to be a soldier, I'm going to be one. You know what, Pop? All of a sudden I don't give a damn if I ever lace on a glove again. How do you like that?"

Rocky stiffened. He looked at Jimmy with the impersonal eyes of a stranger. "You're in the Army, mister. You got assigned here and you'll stay here until your orders are changed."

You catch the Champ with a left and right to the head and you feel a gratifying sense of exhilaration as the Champ grabs and holds with desperate strength. You shake him off, pound him inside, bring the attack up to the head. The crowd's roar fills your head with sweet music. You trade punches and the Champ breaks first, moving back on his long brown feet. In a corner you hook your left and suddenly the Champ is under, bombarding you with red leather. The ring shakes and the canvas comes up to meet you. You stay down, gulping air, trying to regulate your pounding insides. When you come up the Champ charges. You see the punches coming and you roll with them so they don't hurt so much. The mouthpiece is hard and dry in your mouth. You spit it out. Seconds later you regret it when the Champ slams your lips into your teeth. You spit blood, walk in slugging. You don't hear the crowd, you don't hear the bell, until the referee pulls you apart. You walk back to your corner on legs that quiver. . . .

FOR a while Jimmy forgot his impatience to get on with the business of conditioning men. He helped Rocky to teach sol-

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diers how to use their fists. He put on the gloves, sparred with his pupils, stopped to show them how to roll away from a punch and counter. He showed them how to land blows that would disable the enemy, rabbit punches that could kill a man; how to use elbows and wrists and the side of a hand to land punishing blows. It was all part of the game, all part of the kill-or-be-killed philosophy. Jimmy began to feel that he was doing something useful, something he was cut out to do.

THEN even this began to pall on him. He began to fidget and brood. Restlessness turned to listlessness. He went through the motions of teaching and sparring but his heart wasn't in it. Rocky commented on this but Jimmy simply said:

"I got a bellyful of this playing around. I want action."

Weeks later, in sparring with a man fifteen pounds lighter, Jimmy was dropped by a left hook to the head. It wasn't a particularly hard punch but Jimmy had just missed with a right hand and was off balance. He landed on his right wrist and in a few moments it began to swell.

Wide-eyed with sudden panic, Rocky examined the damage. "Looks like a bad sprain. I hope to hell it isn't broke."

Jimmy said dully, "If it's broke, it'll heal. Hanging around here it's got plenty time to knit."

Rocky shook his head. "A broken wrist is bad enough but when it happens to a fighter, it's no good. Sometimes it heals all right, sometimes he's got trouble. Even when it's healed, he's lost about ten percent of the use of his hand. Remember Paddy Wilson? He broke his wrist and he was never the same fighter after that."

Jimmy looked him in the eyes. "Don't let it worry you, Captain. Broke or not I'll never be the same fighter either. In fact, I don't intend to get inside a pro ring again."

Rocky's jaw muscles bunched. He opened his lips. "I don't get it, son."

"I got a crazy bug in my head. I can't see myself collecting big checks with a free conscience, not while there's fellers I know who'll never collect any checks because their old man can't push buttons."

Rocky stared. "You crazy kid. You want to be a hero and win medals. You're doing your part—"

"The hell with the medals," Jimmy cried. "As for me doing my part, I just don't feel that way, that's all."

In silence they crossed the field, heading for Medical. Just before they went inside, Rocky said, "If you want action, you're going to get it. I'm a damn fool and I'll probably be the sorriest guy in the world, but I won't keep you here if you don't want to stay. Jimmy, when this war is over, if you should decide you'd like to beat the Champ's brains out—for you and for me, too—I'll be in your corner."

Sixty days later, his sprained wrist completely healed, Jimmy reported to San Francisco, an embarkation port. Before he went overseas, he received a letter from Rocky. Rocky Dolan was also going overseas but in the opposite direction. A troop of ex-fighters would visit various camps in England and entertain soldiers by exhibitions and team matches against the British. Rocky Dolan would act as trainer and supervisor.

Months later Rocky was in North Africa, then Sicily, then Italy. For a long while Jimmy heard nothing from Rocky. Then one day he received an air mail letter from his mother. The news was bad. Rocky Dolan and four others had gone up in a plane headed for England. The plane had never reached its destination. Rocky Dolan was one of the great number of soldiers "missing in action."

For a while there was the desperate hope that some of the victims had been picked up by a vessel which, due to wartime conditions, could not send out any messages. Or that, perhaps, some survivors had managed to reach land. But as the months passed, hope died into reality.

With a wrenching desolateness Jimmy knew he'd never see Rocky again. He lay long nights staring dry-eyed into the darkness, thinking of Rocky Dolan, who had dreamed of someday being Champion of the World. He could still see the sadness in his father's eyes that night Uncle Charlie had told him that his dream could not materialize; the wistful gleam behind the laughter when Uncle Charlie had said, "Maybe Jimmy can do what his old man couldn't. . . ."

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"Why not?" Jimmy thought. "That's what Pop wanted. . . ."

Getting Rocky Dolan's name listed in the record book as Champion of the World would be a fitting memorial to a man who had honestly loved the fight game. . . .

IN THE twelfth round you're fighting on sheer nerve. Your legs are wobbly at the knees. Every time the Champ lands you feel the sob coming up from inside you. You think of Pop and you know it's no use; you can't beat this human dynamo. You make a last try. The Champ comes close and you let loose with everything you've got. Only it isn't enough. Suddenly the lights break into a million pieces and go out and you're in a dark closet on the floor, the clothing piled around your head, muffling your breath. In the distance, miles and miles away, you hear a bell ringing, a big Chinese gong that echoes in your ears.

Then somebody picks you up and steers you to a seat. You stretch out, nice and easy. Somebody dumps water over your head. You holler for him to cut it out. You hear voices, a lot of voices. You open your eyes. And you see him, big as life, Rocky Dolan, the real Rocky, hands on hips, glaring at you like he's sore about something.

"Pop," you say, "Pop, I'm losing your fight, ain't I?"

There's a kind of radiance shining from his face. Rocky says, "You ain't lost yet, Jimmy. You got three rounds to take him and you can do it. What the hell are you scared of him for? He's washed up, ready for the cleaners. Go on and beat his head off."

Pop talks on and you listen and the warm glow comes up and surrounds you and you feel new strength in your arms and legs.

"Go take him, Jimmy," Pop says. "He's got nothing but a prayer."

The Champ tries to sidestep you when you come charging but you got new juice in your legs. You pour a rain of punches to his head. It's a funny kind of head, all lopsided and blurry but you connect again and again. The jar runs up your arms to the shoulders and it feels good. The Champ grabs you and holds tight and tries to wrestle you into a corner but you punch inside and he backs away. You don't remember swinging but the Champ's mouthpiece is hanging out. He looks so funny you want to laugh. The Champ stumbles. You throw punches, wild crazy punches. The Champ goes down and you stand over him. The referee stops counting and pushes you away. You tell him, what's the idea? He walks you to a neutral corner and then he goes back to where the Champ is getting up. The referee is wiping the Champ's gloves on his sweat-stained shirt, then he turns to motion you out of your corner. You stand there trying to get your jumbled thoughts together. You're in a ring. That you know. And there's a big brown man. . . .

"Get him, Jimmy," Pop hollers in your ear.

Then you remember. You slam the Champ against the ropes. He swings back but punches like that you could eat all day. Slowly the Champ's hands come down lower and lower. His knees bend and he slumps to the canvas. This time you remember to go to a neutral corner. You stand there until Whitey and Charlie come running to hug you and take you back to your corner.

"You did it," Charlie cries, tears running down his cheeks. "God, boy, Rocky should have been here. He would've been proud of you."

What's he talking about? "Pop," you cry out. "Pop, where are you?"

Whitey and Charlie look at each other, puzzled.

You holler, "Stop kidding, Pop, stop playing games."

"Take it easy," Charlie says. "Just relax and take it easy."

The gray film comes away from your eyes. Now you can see the announcer as he says into the mike: "The time, two minutes and thirty seconds, thirteenth round. The winner and new world Champion, Rocky Dolan. . . ."

The crowd goes crazy and you think, He should've said Rocky Dolan the first. You open your lips to tell it to Charlie, then you just close your eyes and lean back in your chair. Charlie wouldn't understand. . . .

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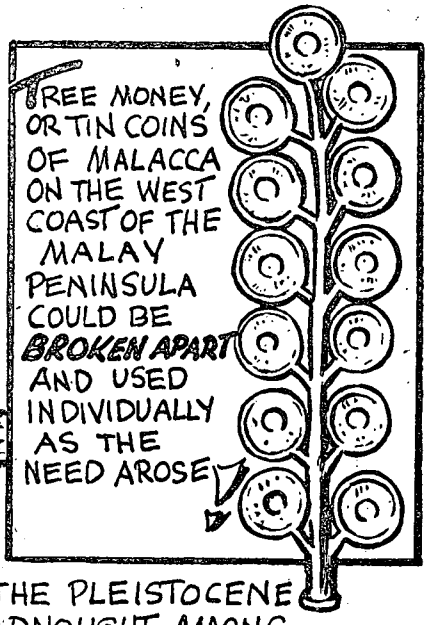
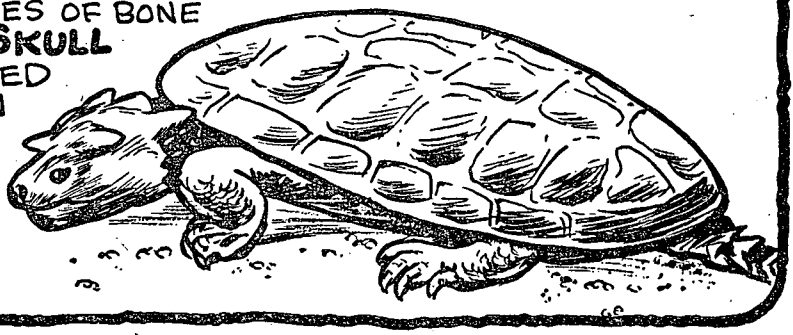
Curioddities By Weill

GYPSIES TEACH THEIR DANCING BEARS TO MASSAGE THE MUSCLES OF WEARY FIELD WORKERS BY *WALKING UP AND DOWN UPON THE FIGURE OF A* ***RECLINING PATIENT!***



TREE MONEY, OR TIN COINS OF MALACCA ON THE WEST COAST OF THE MALAY PENINSULA COULD BE ***BROKEN APART*** AND USED INDIVIDUALLY AS THE NEED AROSE!

THE GIANT ARMORED TORTOISE, MIOLANIA, OF THE PLEISTOCENE PERIOD, WAS A SUPER-DREADNOUGHT AMONG TORTOISES BECAUSE OF ITS GREAT FLANGES AND BOSSES OF BONE ON THE **SKULL** AND SPIKED RINGS ON THE **TAIL!**



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Railroad Detectives—They're Dam' Hard to Brush Off

A LIGHT Maine rain cooled the air as Mo Daniels whipped his V-8 across the state line, leaving the Bay State behind his purring rubber at a smooth sixty. He put his window halfway up with a quick left hand, leaving an opening for the smoke from two cigars to whirl out of the car.

The dash-clock passed the hour and a radio voice extolled the virtues of a gasoline Daniels never used, then gave way to the clear, rapid-fire tones of a newscaster.

"—in Berlin today—Warsaw reports—from Mukden a story is received—on the political front at home—"

When the precise voice gave way to another commercial, Terence Liffy, Chief of the Atlantic and Northern Railroad Police snorted loudly.

"Don't they ever mention important stuff?" he demanded. "The killing at Ryeport Radio was an hour ago. Where's the latest news?"

Daniels shot a split-second glance at his boss. He saw the deep-seams around the Chief's mouth and the heavy jaw clamped hard on the cigar. The Chief was more used to railroad coach cushions than a fast car on a wet road.

"Local news is next," Daniels said, "they'll probably talk about it then."

He braked the fast, light car and almost side-slipped into a wet, shining, black macadam road that led east from the four-lane turnpike. The newscaster was talking again. Liffy turned up the volume control until a giant mouth seemed to yammer from the dash.

"—found dead at his post in the Ryeport Radio Station just before noon, today. The man was Clifford Freeman, a wireless operator, and police report that he had been struck several times on the head, death probably resulting from these injuries. Ryeport Radio Station is not a broadcasting station, such as WEBI to which you are now tuned, but a commercial station which handles ship, airplane, and international traffic. Police say they are checking several leads, including one on a blue convertible sedan seen near the scene of the crime, and an early break in the case is expected.

"A record catch was registered this morning by the trawler—"

MO DANIELS twisted the left-hand knob and the newscaster strangled on his fishing news. They raced another mile in silence.

"Well," Liffy said, "we know a little more than we did. How far is it to the station now?"

"Three miles," Daniels told him as he skidded into a sharp turn and gunned away from a wire fence with inches to waste. "Just about a mile this side of PD Junction. You remember where the tower is?"

"Yeah," Liffy grunted, pulling his hat down with a nervous gesture, "but don't kill us till we see what's up. This isn't our case, but maybe we'll find something that has to be taken care of."

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UNCODE MY DOUBLE-CROSS

By WILLIAM L. ROHDE

Daniels' white teeth bared for an instant, then he wiped the grin away. Chief Liffy preferred simple cases he could understand, like removing drunks from railroad stations —tracing stolen freight—finding lost children in holiday crowds. It would make the Chief happy if there were no connection between the A. & N. and a murder in a radio station on the Atlantic Ocean's windswept border.

"There's a lot of angles," Mo said. "Ryeport Radio is on A. & N. property. They lease the land from us. They use our wires somewhere for part of their teletype circuit, and Cliff Freeman was a towerman for us, before he went into the Navy and came back a radio op for All-World Wireless."

"Don't mean much," Liffy muttered hopefully, "still a case for the Staties and maybe the Feds. But we better check up. The head office will want a report."

They turned into a gravel-surfaced road, bumped over an unprotected crossing for the A. & N.'s double-tracked main line, and saw the white buildings of the Ryeport Radio Station, huddled on a headland beneath towering antenna masts. There were seven automobiles clustered around the station, four of them complete with fender-sirens and police fishpole aerials.

Chief Liffy climbed out of the car with a relieved sigh and lumbered into the main building. Daniels followed him, deep in thought—he was wondering when they were going to eat and who won the third at Belmont.

A lot of big, quiet men crowded the small main office of the radio station, like a group

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of well-fed realtors on the tag-end of a rough convention. Daniels recognized Lieutenant Paul Haskins of the local department, and three of his lads who doubled as print and picture men. Haskins was talking to a man with a small black case in his hand—a doctor.

The main interest in the room was the body, sheet-covered and placed next to a far wall.

A maze of chalk marks on and around the high cabinet of an R.M.C.A. ET-8019 high-frequency radio-telegraph transmitter showed where the dead man was found.

Daniels listened to Liffy and Haskins.

". . . just the way we found him," Haskins said, "no prints but his own and the other ops'. No weapon. No nothin'. His money was gone, though. Plain robbery, looks like."

Liffy nodded. "Thanks. Ask us for anything you want from our end—this station is built on railroad property."

Haskins nodded to his men who were leaving. "Yeah, Terry, I know that. We'll take care of this. Thanks."

Daniels watched the friendly expression on the Chief's face cloud a bit, then relax into a mixture of relief and annoyance. Railroad police are used to brush-offs—but they still feel the sting of unwarranted bad manners.

Two men came in with a basket-stretcher, and what was left of Clifford Freeman went for a ride. Haskins and the State men followed the basket, and the radio room seemed suddenly to swell in size. Daniels and Liffy were left alone with a radio operator at his position in what looked like an emergency desk, and one of Haskins' boys who apparently settled down for a long wait.

Liffy muttered, "That's that, Mo. Let's hit the road for town. All that fast driving for nothin'."

Daniels nodded. "O.K., just a minute, Chief, this looks like old times."

HE WENT over to the radio operator who sat silently with double-earphones on his head. Even seated, he looked like a big man, with the build of an All-American. He lifted the earphones and flipped the loudspeaker switch when Daniels paused beside him.

"Hello," Mo put out his hand. "I'm Mo Daniels. Held a 2nd class radio-telegraph ticket during the war."

The big man grinned and shook with a firm grip. "Hiyuh. I'm Johnny Roper. I learned the business riding Liberties. What's new on the case?"

Daniels shrugged. "They don't tell me anything. You probably know more about it than I do. Any hot tips?"

Roper made a disgusted snort. "Nah—I've been questioned nine times by nine cops. They got me out of bed to take over the watch here. I'm the third trick man. Some tramp needed money and Cliff put up an argument, I guess. He was a swell guy, too."

The loudspeaker fed a ribbon of high speed code into the room that sounded like one continuous whine broken with a faint stutter.

"Wow," Mo grunted and whistled softly, "what speed is that? Where's it from?"

Roper laughed. "Hell, I can't read it. That's high-speed machine stuff for experts. Just between us, my 500 kilocycle watch is on that other speaker—been on all the time, but I sat over here to stay out of the way."

"Don't blame you," Daniels told him, "Take it easy, Johnny. I'll drop around sometime to talk over the old days."

"Swell," the operator said. He seemed to mean it.

Daniels followed Liffy out into cool air, cleansed by the brief rain, and they drove slowly toward Ryeport.

"Damn Haskins," Liffy said suddenly, "I gave him tips twenty years ago, when he pinned on his first tin. Now listen to him—'We'll take care of this. Thanks'."

"Yeah," Daniels agreed, "he grew up fast. Being one of the kingpins on a small force, he thinks he's a mighty frog because his puddle is so small."

Terence Liffy fired up a fresh cigar and blew out a cloud of blue smoke with a decisive puff. "Mo," he said, "we'll have some chow and then I'll take the train back to Boston. You stay here until tomorrow noon and see what you can dig up. Call me then and I'll tell you where to go—maybe over to Portland on those missing freight complaints."

Daniels thought—"Ryeport is a nice town to spend a night in—wonder if the food is still tops at the Lobster House—does Margie

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what's-her-name still work in the telephone office?"

He said. "Right, Chief. I'll write up a report, anyway."

The food at the Lobster House was still good. When Daniels left his boss beside the Boston Express the Chief was in fine humor again, on the outside of a big fish dinner.

DANIELS parked his car near the local police station. Paul Haskins was in his office, but he wasted no effort giving Daniels a warm greeting.

"Everything is under control," he said shortly, "we'll have something to show in this case almost anytime."

Daniels smiled as genially as he could and passed out a cigar. "I've gotta write a report," he told the local man, "you know how that is. How about letting me copy what I need of your notes and then I'll be out of your way?"

Haskins thought it over. He lit the cigar, found it good, and pressed a buzzer. "Bring me in the carbons on that Ryeport Radio case," he barked, when his desk intercom acknowledged, "ask Miss Rizzo if they're ready."

Daniels was glad he wasn't on Haskins' force.

He wondered if the city dick gumshoed around the local bars to see if his men were off the straight and narrow.

A pretty girl with a scared expression brought some papers to Haskins and went quickly out without a word. She had midnight blue hair, and a figure good enough for Haskins to follow with his eyes—and he must have seen it a thousand times. She looked rather like a rabbit that knows the hunter is around as she moved quickly with her shoulders slumped forward a little.

"Look 'em over," Haskins said, and tossed the papers across the desk, "you can write your report from those notes. I believe in getting every bit of information down on paper."

"Thanks," Mo said, "this saves me a lot of legwork."

He read slowly, absorbing the information on the six sheets of onionskin paper, and then made a few notes in his notebook.

—body found abt 11:25 am—fell in front of transmitter—robbed—no weapon—blue convertible seen leaving station road—"

He stopped reading and looked up. "How about suspects? Nothing here on them."

Haskins smiled, a sardonic question mark with his mouth doing all the work. "You don't want all our trade secrets, do you, Mo? I'll tell you this much—we'll have the man who did it by tonight."

Daniels shrugged, and wrote down the names and addresses of the three regular operators at the radio station, and that of the woman who had seen the blue car.

He thanked Haskins and went out into a bright day, with a salt-tanged breeze that made you want to lie on warm sand and listen to the ball game on a portable radio. Daniels thought he might do just that.

He turned east, towards the breakwater along which he had parked his car, and watched the masts of a small schooner beating its way out from the port. The little ship was framed in the canyon of business buildings that led to the waterfront. Daniels wondered why they didn't put pictures like that on postcards instead of the conventional fluff.

"Please—" the voice was light, with a strain of worry smearing the tones. The hand on his arm felt like the flutter of a sparrow's wing.

"Hello, there," Daniels said and stopped walking. The scared girl from Haskins' office looked even more interesting in the sunlight. He noted that she had large brown eyes that ought to be laughing, not worried and under-shadowed.

"Let's go in here," she said softly, tugging him toward a neon sign that said "Luncheonette," "I shouldn't like to be seen talking to you."

"Gee, has my reputation got up here all ready?"

She laughed a second after that, but it was a tiny sound, bitten off short.

"No, but Ryeport is a small place, and I work for the town. And one of Mr. Haskins' officers might see us and—"

They were in a lonely back booth before she started talking again.

"You're a detective."

"Aw, you're just being nice. I'm a railroad cop who tries to keep warm and dry most of the time. Detectives get wet. Out in the rain and all, following people. I've read about 'em."

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She smiled then, just a little, but a waiter arrived and she jumped three inches.

DANIELS watched her with sober eyes. "Bacon and tomato," he asked, "and coffee?"

She nodded and Mo held up two fingers for the white-coated young man to see. He repeated the order and walked away.

"Now, c'mon," Daniels said, "tell me all about it and you'll feel better. Tonight we'll drive out to the local music mill and I'll show you how a real square dances. How's that sound?"

She sighed. "You make it sound nice, but I didn't stop you for a date. I need help."

"You've come to the right boy, maybe. Shoot."

She looked straight at him, and seemed to find some confidence in the black eyes which he tried to keep calm and reassuring.

"It's about the murder."

He nodded. "I thought it was."

"I went out a few times with Cliff Freeman—"

She seemed to run out of words.

"He showed g o o d taste," Daniels prompted, "so what happened?"

The flood gates opened then. "I know Paul Haskins is going to arrest my brother—he has a blue convertible Ford. Paul thinks Tony was mad at Clifford—but he wasn't, they were friends—I think Tony was a bit drunk last night, and perhaps this morning—he's disappeared—"

Daniels thought of the beach and the portable radio. He went over his plans—to write a report in thirty minutes and take a little rest looking around Ryeport for leads, but not looking too hard.

He sighed, and said, "So, Tony, your brother, I suppose, was drunk last night. Maybe he did do something, lot's of guys do when they're drunk."

The brown eyes widened, then brimmed with tears. "That's what Paul Haskins said, and he should know better. You're all alike."

Some of the droplets began to fall over the smooth brown ovals of her cheeks. Daniels swung around the table to sit beside her and offer his clean white handkerchief. He saw his rest at Ryeport go glimmering.

"Now, look, Sugar—what's your name?"

"Connie Rizzo—they call me Candy," the answer came through tiny sobs.

"Candy? So Sugar wasn't far wrong at that."

Daniels swung back around the table and talked in as firm a voice as he could muster, like a man telling a child not to be afraid of the dark.

"If Tony did it, all the railroad cops in the world won't save him. Paul Haskins is a good cop, I think, and he'll get to the bottom of this. If Tony is clear, there's nothing to worry about."

Candy Rizzo mopped up her tears and sniffles. "I think I'm a better judge of Paul than you are. He'll get Tony if he can. I've been turning his dates down for months. He's mad at us."

Mo wanted to say, "Give the guy a good date and the kid will probably be able to rob the local bank"—instead he told her, "You cheer up and stop worrying. It makes those pretty brown eyes all sad and swollen."

He lit cigarettes. "Look—I'm supposed to make a quick check on this mess, since it started on railroad property. I promise you I'll see just what goes on, and it'll be on the level. But if Tony did it, he's the guy I'll bring in, just as quick as Haskins will."

Candy smiled the little one again and put a long, warm hand on top of his. "Thanks, that's all I'm asking. I know Haskins won't dare try anything if he's watched."

Their order came. She picked up half of her sandwich, pushed the plate across to Mo, and slid out of the booth.

"I've got to run."

"Hey, how about that date tonight?"

"I'm in the phone book. Call me at seven," she said, and was gone.

Mo ate all of the sandwiches and emptied both cups. He tumbled the few facts he had over in his mind—and came up with exactly nothing.

IN ADDITION to the ex-Clifford Freeman and Johnny Roper, a man named Benjamin Root was listed as an operator at Ryeport Radio. Daniels found his house, a small, neat, green and white frame building, north along the coast road. There was a cabin cruiser of some 30-odd feet tied at the end of a pier that led away from the back yard.

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Benjamin Root was a smallish, stocky man who looked like Norman Rockwell's idea of a solid Vermont citizen. Daniels found him working in his vegetable garden, a neat patch of cultivated ground to the north of the trim little house.

Mo showed his tin and introduced himself. Root responded quietly, and stopped hoeing corn to light up a brown-stained clay pipe.

"Another one," he said through the first cloud of smoke. "Paul Haskins' boys were out here a while ago."

"Oh," Daniels said, "I just left Paul, but I guess your story hasn't been written up yet. Can you just tell me what you told them?"

"Yep. Nothin'."

Mo nodded, as though the answer were perfectly satisfactory. "Yeah," he said, "I guess you can't say much if you don't notice anything out of the way. This questioning is just a formality anyway."

Benjamin Root smoked and looked.

Daniels grinned. "Interview is over," he said. "But say, how'd you happen to take up radio? I've got a ticket myself."

Root's eyes narrowed. "Commercial one —or one o' them two fer a penny third-class phone jobs?"

"Second-class telegraph. Got it during the war, riding T-2's and Victories."

Root softened. He didn't relax or beam, he just looked at Daniels as if he were a man instead of a bothersome robot.

"Wanna see a real ham station?" he asked. "Got one o' the best in New England."

"Say, is that right?" Daniels was surprised and looked it. He stepped back and looked up into the air. Then he grinned.

"I guess I'm getting old. Isn't that an ultra-high freq reflector antenna up there? On the pole with your half-wave job?"

"That's right," Root nodded enthusiastically, "I'm operatin' an experimental rig that's a beaut."

FOR the next half-hour Daniels listened to radio talk—a few words of which he managed to understand. The small attic of the little house was jammed with transmitters, receivers, and even a Mackay 105-A direction finder set up for operation.

"War surplus," Root cackled when Daniels stared at it. "I do more work with it than the Coast Guard. Call 'em on the phone and give 'em real bearings!"

"Wow," Daniels said, looking at the mass of equipment, "I'll bet when Ryeport Radio has trouble they know which op to call."

"They sure do," Root snorted, "them other kids is just key pushers. If I didn't watch 'em they'd have us all over the bands."

"The boys aren't interested in radio the way you are, I guess," Mo said gently.

"No, sir. They've got their own little affairs. Women and money. That's a young man's life. Take my advice, young man, and get back into radio."

"Maybe I will," Mo said, and by leading the way, managed to get back downstairs.

Outside he pointed to the cabin cruiser. "Nice boat, Ben, ever rent her out?"

"Just once."

Mo looked at Ben and Ben looked at Mo. There had been a few first names used in the past ten minutes—the atmosphere was slowly warming up.

Root cackled and broke the silence. "All right, young feller, I rented it just once to the boys I work with. Cliff and Johnny. They wanted to go fishin'."

Daniels grinned at him. "Thanks, Ben."

"The other thing I told you, about 'em bein' interested in women and money. You wanted to know that, didn't you?"

Daniels nodded, watching the shrewd eyes with the deep wrinkles at their corners.

Root seemed to be ready to go back to his garden.

"Take my advice," he said again, "go back into radio, Mo."

"Maybe," Mo replied, and shook hands and walked away.

"Hey," Root called after him, "one more thing."

Mo turned, with a questioning glance.

"They didn't bring in any fish," the radioman said as he turned away and went towards his garden.

A SOFT, warm dusk was closing in when Daniels bounced his V-8 lightly over the tracks toward the Ryeport Radio Station. The cluster of cars had thinned out, leaving one black sedan with its telltale fishpole an-

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tenna and a new, maroon Packard that gleamed, even in the fading light.

Inside the station a detective from Haskins' staff sat watching Johnny Roper handle traffic with a Vibroplex. The operator finished sending with a final reef and "GN," shortly after Daniels entered.

"Hi, Mo. Returned to the scene of the crime, eh?"

"Yeah," Mo laughed, "they say the killer always comes back. You think about that around midnight."

"I won't have to. Ben Root says he'll be in at nine. We'll split the shift and get another op up here tomorrow."

The detective in the chair, a thin man of about forty who looked as if he spent little time worrying and less thinking—grinned at them. "What's new in town? When's Haskins gonna let me come in? He say?"

"No," Mo told him, "find anything new here?"

The man snorted. "You kiddin'?"

Mo slumped into the unoccupied watch position—a comfortable oak chair with a frayed cloth seat pad—and lit a cigar. As an afterthought he passed one to the thin detective who nodded appreciatively. Johnny Roper got up and turned on the switch of an electric hot plate which supported a king-size coffee pot. There was a period of silence, broken only by the crackle of the loud-speaker keeping its constant vigil on the ether.

"Say, Johnny," Mo broke the quiet, speaking casually and very smoothly, "Ben tells me you and Freeman took his boat out fishing a couple of weeks ago. Did Cliff say anything that might give us a lead? Anybody mad at him?"

Johnny Roper's clean-cut chin dropped a little. "Coupla weeks ago," he said quickly. "We was out on the fourth of last month. That's six weeks ago. What's the matter with Ben?"

"Maybe I misunderstood him," Mo said easily. "Did he ever tell you anything?"

"No. Don't think he had any enemies, 'cept maybe a few brothers and fathers around here. You know how it is."

Mo smoked in thoughtful silence for another five minutes. The operator poured three cups of coffee and passed them around.

Mo opened up again. "Johnny—when you came down here after the police called you to take over the station, was the high-freq transmitter on? I mean the one in front of which Cliff dropped?"

The operator seemed to hesitate, as though remembering with an effort. Mo watched him closely—one thing a radio operator should remember without any trouble was whether he had to shut off a main transmitter.

"Ye-yes," Roper said, "why—sure! I remember. It was humming away and the generator was plenty hot."

"Any call backs? Anybody contact you and say that Cliff was working with 'em and cut off?"

"Naw," the operator shook his head. "Not a peep from anyone."

"How about the message blanks? All O.K.?"

"Yep." Roper tossed a yellow carbon in Mo's lap. "There's the last one he handled, at 11:09. I called the ship that put that batch in—the operator says Cliff signed for 'em as usual. Nothing out of the way."

Daniels sighed and pulled his 200-odd pounds out of the comfortable chair. "Thanks, Johnny. Guess I'll get back to town. See you tomorrow."

"If you see Haskins," the quiet detective said through a cloud of cigar smoke, "just sorta mention that I'm here."

"O.K.," Mo told him, and went out.

He noted that the Packard had local plates. His new V-8 looked small and dusty beside it.

"Anyway, Baby," he muttered as he raced towards town, "you can beat all the big boys on the getaway."

DANIELS parked his car behind the hotel, a block from the town hall that housed the police offices, and carried his bag into the very old, but clean-smelling lobby.

The Tarry House was New England, from carved oak trim to ancient brown chairs topped with white antimacassars.

The room he drew was large and airy, with two windows looking toward the sea across the tops of the town buildings. He stripped to the waist, put through a call to a Boston number, and was just rubbing his wiry black hair with a large, thick towel when the operator called him back.

"Hello," he said when a girl's voice

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sounded in his ear, "let me talk to Mr. Robinson."

He lit a cigarette, flipping the match alight from the packet with one practiced hand, and took it from his lips as a familiar voice greeted him.

"Hello, Robby?"

"This is Mr. Robinson."

"Yeah," Mo said, "and this is Mo Daniels. Don't get formal with me, Robby, or I'll tell Gus to spike your beer."

The earpiece laughed at him. "Hi, Mo. Poker tonight? Count me in."

"No, Robby. I'm on a job. Say, can you get the watch sheets and see what was doing from Ryeport Radio this morning about eleven? Or run off the recording if you were making one."

"I've got the sheet on my desk, Mo. The police were after that information. I mailed it to about five different places, and I've passed it out over the phone as many times."

Mo whistled in pleased surprise, wondering if Haskins had held out on him or had not yet received the record from the FCC listening post when he showed him his report.

"Swell, Robby, let me have it."

"There isn't anything much, Mo. We had a new operator on watch here, and he was taking the stuff down on the mill off the regular bands. But he didn't get anything."

"Whaddya mean? You just said you gave it to—?"

"Sure, sure," the FCC man interrupted him, "all right, here it is. At 11:17 a transmitter came on with a strong continuous wave. At 11:20 it sent a clumsy CQ with Ryeport's sign. Then our lad took down this . . . got a pencil, Mo?"

Daniels pulled his notebook and pencil from his coat on the bed. "Shoot."

"Here it is—L space BII space EIEE5-EEI."

Daniels stared at what he had written. "Go on," he barked, "go ahead."

"That's all. The transmitter was DF'd as Ryeport, but that's all there was. This new op is good. He put it down as it came, I'm sure."

Daniels thanked him, told him he'd see him at the usual place soon, and hung up.

He sat on the bed and wrote the symbols out and played with them for fifteen minutes. He tried various kinds of quick ciphers and substitutions, but always wound up with what had appeared on the FCC operator's typewriter—"L BII EIEE5EEI."

Finally, with a disgusted slap, he threw the notebook on the bed and opened his pigskin bag. He put on a clean white shirt with a spread collar and tied a Windsor knot in a light-blue-and-red silk summer tie. Then he looked up Candy's number in the local book and called it.

He recognized the soft voice, although it was pitched very low and seemed to tremble. "Hi, Sugar," he said, "when'll I pick you up?"

"I don't know—" he thought of the hand that had trembled on his arm. The voice seemed to do the same thing to his ears. "They've got my brother in jail, charged with murder!"

"Hold everything," Mo gasped, "I'll be right out."

There was no answer. Candy Rizzo had hung up.

AFTER three false moves he found the address which the telephone book had said belonged to C. Rizzo. The house was large and old, with front windows on the first floor that must have been six feet high. The porch was newly painted and the grounds were neat, as though a pensioned middle-class citizen kept himself busy around his house. Candy Rizzo answered his first pull at the old-fashioned wire bell knob.

She came out onto the porch and stood there. Her eyes were dry, but some of the scared look remained. And something had been added—there was a determined, fighting quality about her small, firm chin that had not been there in the afternoon.

"Hello," Mo said, "let's sit down and hear about it."

"Haskins' men found him on his boat," she said, as they sat in the porch hammock which seemed to shelter them with its brown canvas back and sides. "Paul charged him with murder right away."

"How do you know?"

"I was there," she said with a toss of her head. "When they brought him in I asked Paul to help us. Then—"

"Yes," Mo prodded gently.

"Then I told Paul what I thought of him. After he almost laughed at me. I quit."

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She put her head in her hands. "Oh, how I hate him."

Mo put a tender arm around her shoulders, telling himself, "Business and pleasure, always mix 'em."

Then he frowned as the girl choked back a sob and straightened her small shoulders with a defiant lift. "I'll fight him," she said, "I'll prove that Tony didn't do it."

Mo felt a little like a heel. "All right," he said, "let's see. Just what does he have on Tony? Tell me what you know, and maybe we'll be able to do something."

The big brown eyes were very close to him, dampness adding to their sparkle. "We! You'll help—?"

"Easy, now. I'm just a small-size cop. Let's hear your story."

"I talked to Tony for a minute. He was out on his boat all day—since early morning, that is. He said he just slept and drank beer to try and straighten up after last night. Paul found quite a lot of money on Tony, but Tony has a good job and he often carries a lot. And Paul says Tony and Cliff had an argument last week at the Casino."

"Did they?"

"Yes, but it was just an argument. Tony wouldn't kill him."

Mo rubbed his neck and looked out into the darkness. He wondered if there was still time to pull out of this mess—then he felt ashamed of himself. Sure—go have a drink and enjoy yourself, while this girl cries herself to sleep.

He stood up. "Let's go see if we can talk to your brother."

She followed him to the car without a word.

RYEPORT'S police station was enjoying the spotlight of public interest. A small mob of newspaper men, photographers, and interested ghouls were assembled to try and get what each wanted—headlines, pictures of the prisoner smoking a cigarette and looking tough, or a morbid thrill to take home to bed.

Daniels shouldered his way into Haskins' office and waited until the burly lieutenant had brushed off some eager beavers who wanted his story for a true crime magazine. He had left Candy in the car, with orders not to follow him.

"Hello, Daniels." Haskins was tired and surly. "Well—it's in the bag. You can tell Liffy that the A. & N. is clear."

"Thanks, Paul. What motive?"

The city officer looked up sharply. "Robbery and revenge—or, say, revenge with robbery to cover up."

"Well—which is it?"

Haskins' big paw struck the desk. "For Pete's sake, Daniels, why don't you write your report and go home? You've got as much business in this case as—"

He stopped, looked at Mo with quick eyes, and then slowed down. "Look, Mo, you gotta job. I gotta job. I give you a lift. You give me a lift. Now, get the dope you want and let's get to bed."

Mo nodded. "Good enough. Can I see the prisoner? Just so I can tell Liffy I was right on the job."

Haskins opened his mouth, and Mo was sure he meant to say—"Hell, no!"

Instead, Haskins collected himself and nodded grimly. "All right. Take a quick one and let us alone."

He nodded to an officer who led Mo through the office and down a flight of stairs. They walked through a corridor beneath the town hall, and into a room smelling of disinfectant and stale, much-breathed air.

Another uniformed man unlocked a barred door, and they went through, past a large bull-pen occupied by several men seated glumly with their backs to the far wall, to a side passage that contained four cells.

"There he is," the local cop motioned at a form lying on the bare wooden bunk with his face to the wall. "That's the guy."

"Hey, Tony," Daniels said. "C'm here a minute."

The man did not stir.

The cop swung his bunch of keys against the bars with a loud clang. "Get up you," he said, "or I'll come in and get you up."

Daniels slipped out his wallet and removed two new tens. He held them up in front of the blue-shirted officer. The man's shrewd eyes lit on them and hung on.

"Nobody here but us," Daniels said softly, "these are yours if you'll go back to the turnkey and get me a pencil—and take two minutes to do it."

The two bills disappeared as if a magician had waved his hand over them.

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"All right," the thin lips of the other man almost whispered, "but if you pull anything at all out of line. You'll both get it."

The man's right hand was patting his .38. Daniels winked at him sardonically. The officer paused for a moment as though to change his mind, then sauntered away.

"Tony!" Daniels hissed, "get off that bunk and come here. Candy sent me."

The man on the bed turned, groaned, and rolled on his belly until he could twist his feet over onto the cement floor. He had to push himself erect with his arms, and then made the bars with one rush and hung on.

Tony Rizzo was a mess. It wasn't so much what showed, unless you noticed eyes bloodshot and sunk with pain, lips chalk white with hardly a hint of blood running to them, and hands that clenched at the cold bars because the legs would not support the body for very long.

Daniels knew the signs of a "treatment." Rubber hoses or soft saps don't make too many marks for the judge to see, but he could imagine the blue mass that must be Tony's back and chest—the bruised and throbbing kidneys—retching, tortured stomach—battered groin and aching shins.

"Look, kid," Daniels said, "you gotta talk. You don't know me, but if you know anything that might help yourself, spill it now. You've got nothing to lose."

Tony Rizzo's head came up, and Mo winced as he saw brown eyes that might belong to Candy—only these eyes were bleak and squinted with pain. The boy had a clean, weak look about him that time would strengthen or smash. He might be a college sophomore who hadn't yet learned the ropes.

"Dunno you," Tony said slowly, "who're you?"

"A friend of your sister's. Maybe I can help you, if you're clean. Did you do it?"

"No—no," the head shook slowly, "no—no."

"But they made you say yes?"

"Yes—but no—no—no."

"Did you sign anything?"

"Yes—but I didn't do it—no."

Daniels breathed deeply, but there was no clean air here to clean the lungs. Anyway, it would take more than air.

"Tony," he said urgently, "can you help us at all? Anything? About Cliff? About anybody?"

Tony's head sagged forward against the bars. "Nothin'. 'Cept on my boat. A box. Cliff said save it for him. I think I know what it is. I saved it."

"Where on your boat?"

"Under galley sink. With the pans."

Tony spoke very slowly, as if it were hardly worth the effort. As if he had no faith in what he was saying, anyway.

"Keep your chin up," Daniels said. "I know something that makes me think you didn't kill Freeman. If you did—you're cooked. But if you didn't—just remember, you've got a good chance."

The cop returned, walking softly. "All right," he said, "let's go."

Haskins looked at Daniels with hard eyes, motioning back with his hand a reporter who was leaning over his desk.

"Now you've seen him," he said. "Satisfied, Mo?"

"Yeah. You were kind of rough on him, though."

Haskins banged some papers in front of him. "So what? One way to make a wop talk. He signed a confession, too."

Mo looked Haskins full in the eyes. They locked glances like two bulls about to lunge and lock horns. The reporter—no small man himself—backed away a step.

"Liffy tells me you were a pretty good cop," Mo said slowly and distinctly. "But I had a grandfather named Martinelli. I'll bet you'd never have made him talk."

The red oozed up from Haskins' collar and swelled his thick neck and heavy jaw. He didn't say any of the things he wanted to. Mo nodded briefly and went out.

A MILE beyond the Yacht Club, bright with lights and sending music from its broad porches out across the highway, Candy showed Mo a small, sandy road that turned toward the sea.

"It's about two miles," she said. "Tony keeps his boat at an old pier that doesn't seem to belong to anyone any more. There are about six or eight boats that tie up there. Owned by local people who can't afford the fancy dock fees in town."

"O. K.," Mo said, wheeling the V-8 through the ruts in the soft sand, "any idea what Tony has in this box?"

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"You mean what Cliff has—or had," she corrected him. "No—but I feel better just knowing that you believe us. I just know it's something that will clear Tony."

Mo thought that was nice. He wished he was as sure. The girl had seemed to pass all her worries onto his shoulders when he had come from seeing Haskins and Tony. He felt a little like Galahad, but he wished he knew where his armor was, or who he was fighting.

The lights of the car showed a loop at the end of the road, and a sloop or catboat moored in the darkness to their right. He swung half-round the loop and stopped.

"Is that his boat?" he asked.

"No," Candy said, "we have to walk out past three or four of them. Tony has a cabin cruiser. It's old, but he repaired it himself. It's quite nice."

He took his pen-light out of his pocket and led the way.

"I'm sorry," Candy said suddenly.

"Why?" Mo asked as he found a narrow catwalk leading out from the shore.

"I should have brought a flashlight, or told you we'd need one."

"Never mind." He followed the narrow boards with his light and tracked the light with his feet. The girl's heels clicked behind him, and one of her hands found his shoulder. "This little light will do. Which boat?"

They passed three hulls, barely discernible in the tiny glow of the pen-light, and then Candy increased the pressure on his shoulder.

"This one. You can step off the walk onto the boards and then to the boat."

Mo followed the wooden trail, stepped down from the walk, and found himself looking at the white deck of a good-sized cruiser. She was quite old; he saw as he traced her with the light, of the vintage before streamlining that ran to good mahogany and oak and lots of headspace in the cabins. He walked toward the stern and clambered aboard. When he stuck his hand back and turned the light down, Candy lifted her skirts and followed him over the gun'l.

"Is she locked up?" Mo asked, looking at the hatchway leading below.

"Probably not, but I have a key, anyway."

The door opened to his touch. Candy went in first, and in a moment they were bathed in light from the 12-volt circuit.

"I can find that switch in the dark," Candy said, "how do you like it?"

Mo glanced around. The cruiser had, apparently, two big cabins and a galley, built beneath a small bridge-deck reached by an inside ladder. She was clean and sweet-smelling, with plenty of paint and varnish applied with a practiced hand. The couch was covered with sturdy, flowered material, and the ports had neat curtains to match.

"You and Tony do all this?" he asked.

"Yes. When he got her, she was nearly a wreck."

"Nice work," Mo said, "let's see the galley."

In a moment he had opened the big pot and pan locker beneath the sink and pulled out a brown cardboard box about a foot square. It was tied firmly with twine and sealed with gummed paper.

"This is it," Mo exclaimed, "gimme a knife."

Candy pulled open a compartmented drawer, held by a notch-lock, and handed him a sharp fish-knife. He slit the twine and the paper that sealed the top of the box. The two sections of the cover opened neatly.

"Oh," Candy said, her voice tinged with dismay, "what's *that?* How can *that* help Tony?"

Daniels stared thoughtfully. What they had found was a large box of what seemed to be poor grade tobacco. He sniffed it, and then burned a piece of the brown, stringy stuff in the flame of a match. An acrid odor filled the cabin.

"What is it," Candy sniffed, "it smells bad enough?"

"Don't quote me on this," Mo said slowly, "but I'll be damned if it can be anything else. It's marijuana or hashish. Comes from Indian hemp. Funnsy stuff. They make reefers out of it—joy smokes—doped cigarettes."

Candy gasped. "But Tony wouldn't—"

"Nobody said he did."

"But—nobody around Ryeport ever—I mean *dope*—"

Mo shrugged. "Who knows. The cities are good markets."

He shredded the weed in his hands, brow knitted in thought.

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"I didn't think they smuggled this stuff in," he said, almost to himself. "I caught some guys once who grew it. It's just a weed really. In the Orient the name comes from India, and here it comes from the American Indians—Indian hemp. Sometimes an expert can't tell if a batch comes from *cannabis sativa indica* or *apocyanum cannabinum.*"

"You're quite an expert, Daniels. *Stand still!*"

The voice came from behind them, near the open hatch. It carried a threat that made Daniels freeze, the marijuana drifting down from his fingers like chaff in a quiet breeze. Candy's tiny scream was accompanied by heavy footsteps coming across the cabin deck.

"Put your hands up against that bulkhead."

DANIELS placed the voice now. It was the thin, nondescript detective who had stayed at the radio station with Roper! Daniels put his hands against the bulkhead as soon as he saw the blue of what looked like a Police Positive from the rear corner of his eye.

A quick, competent hand removed his own .38 Terrier from its shoulder nest. A hand that efficient belonged to a man who would be holding his own gun well back. A man who could use it. A man accustomed to making a pinch and taking no chances.

"Hello," Daniels said finally, "we just found something that might interest you. Why get so hard?"

The feet backed away. "Come out and sit on the couch. Both of you."

They did.

Daniels' estimate of the man changed rapidly. He still looked like a man who floated through life like a chip drifting down a quiet brook—but the firmly held gun, well-back near his hip but centered on Daniels' stomach, and the calm, cool eyes told of a character that gripped one idea at a time and held on.

"What's the score?" Mo asked. "Don't you want to know what we found?"

"In a minute," the thin detective said, "save it a while."

Mo shrugged and pulled out his cigarettes.

The tread of heavy steps thudded above the gentle slap of waves against the cruiser's hull. They came along the catwalk, and then scuffed over the side of the boat. A man came through the hatch. It was Paul Haskins.

"Hello, Paul," Daniels greeted him, "we found a little something that'll interest you. Your pal, there, doesn't seem to trust us."

Haskins dropped into an oak chair, thrusting his feet out and relaxing like a man whose cares make life a hard job. He looked sourly at Candy and Daniels, as if they had personally added to his troubles. The corners of his heavy mouth stayed down for several seconds, then he said, "Damn you, Daniels."

Mo gave him a flat stare. "So I've figured this thing right after all; that right, Haskins?"

The local man snorted, "Figure, hell. You couldn't figure your way out of a paper bag. But you have to stick your big face in here and start to foul me up."

"You fouled it up when you bumped Freeman," Daniels told him.

"Big face yourself," Candy chimed in. "I'll take Mo's face over yours any day!"

Haskins didn't look at her, but the side of his mouth growled, "Shut up, you."

Daniels grinned, hoping to goad Haskins into some sort of move, but the other big man just stared at him, his arms reaching almost to the deck as he slouched in the chair.

"Yeah," Haskins continued, "you couldn't figure out the right time with two watches. I didn't bump Freeman, but I've got a good mind to strangle the punk who did."

Mo took a shot in the air. "Well, this mess will wreck your gravy train."

"Maybe—and maybe not. I haven't slaved on the damn police force for twenty years without learning something. And believe me, Mo, buttin' in here is just your tough luck. I've made a lot of money, real money, and I ain't ready to stop yet."

HE STOOD up, pulling a Savage .380 automatic out of his side coat pocket. "Get up in that forward cabin," he said shortly. "Hurry it up."

Candy gave a little squeal and preceded Daniels through the forward hatchway. Haskins followed them in, while the thin detective came to the door and watched, his

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pistol still at his hip and still aimed at Daniels.

The bow cabin had double bunks along the port bulkhead, with a covered chest-locker and wardrobe locker along the starboard side. Another small door forward showed a washbasin and toilet set in the peak of the bow. Haskins looked around for a possible exit.

"What's that?" he barked at Candy, motioning at what looked like an oblong hatch set in the deck above their heads. There was no ladder, and paint almost obscured its outline.

"That was a small door," she said, "Tony nailed it up and painted it over."

Haskins slammed the palm of his hand against it—a three-pound steak slammed on a butcher's block—and grunted when he found the deck to be solid.

"All right," he said, and backed out.

The cabin door slammed, a key grated in the lock, and Daniels and Candy Rizzo were left alone.

"Well—that's that," Candy murmured in a very small voice.

"Yeah," Mo answered thoughtfully, "but I wish I knew just what. Even if Haskins is lying about killing Freeman, this case just gets deeper into the mud."

"I know—but what are they going to do with us? How will we get out of here?"

"If they leave we can break out easy enough—but I don't think they'll leave. Did your brother ever take part of the engine with him to keep this tub from being stolen?"

Candy shook her head. "No. Just locked the switch."

Daniels nodded. "And Haskins got the keys from Tony when he locked him up. All right, we'll know in a minute."

The whine of the starter confirmed his suspicions, and a second later the rumbling throb of a marine engine warming up vibrated through the deck.

Daniels watched Candy's soft brown eyes expand as worry changed to fear. "They're taking us out. Why, Mo?"

He would have liked to spend an hour or two comforting the girl, but he figured he didn't have the time to spare.

"Brace yourself, Baby. I think we're being taken out for fish food. We've got to get out of here. Can you swim?"

"Some," she said, "but I don't want to jump over into the sea. I'd never make it if it was very far—"

THE girl's clear skin had whitened and her breathing was fast. "Mo—you mean we're going to be killed?"

Feet pounded above their heads as someone cast off the bowline. The rumble of the engine increased and the cruiser seemed to move slowly astern.

"I think so, Sugar," Mo said, "so better get wet if we have to. I can hold you up."

The girl thought a moment. Daniels secretly admitted she was doing a fine job of holding herself up. Perhaps the real hopelessness of their position hadn't gone home to her yet. He hoped it didn't.

"B—but," Candy's voice was three notes higher, "there's a searchlight—they'll run us down—they'll shoot us."

"Yeah, but they don't want to. I guess that thin bird is something of a sailor. They want to dump us all nicely chained and anchored. I'll bet Haskins is figuring it out now. A weight on every limb—neck and crotch—until the only way we'll float in is in the crabs' bellies."

Candy's head came down onto his chest. She stuck her handkerchief in her mouth and began to cry. The cruiser lurched forward in a tight turn to starboard, and Daniels knew they were heading for the inlet mouth and the open sea.

He figured in his head. Haskins was thorough, if nothing else. If he wanted to dump them at least fifteen miles out—say at ten knots an hour—they had a good hour or more in which to figure something out.

He rubbed the back of Candy Rizzo's neck with a gentle hand, then got up and let her slump face down on the bunk cover. The cry would get it out of her system.

Daniels went through the wardrobe locker and the chest-locker, finding exactly nothing in the line of weapons. Tony evidently didn't leave very much of value in his boat—too likely to be stolen. He did find several old Navy coat-type life jackets, hung neatly on hangers in the wardrobe.

The little head was no more fruitful. A few few mops and brushes and several cans of what looked like alcohol for the stove, secured against the bulkhead.

Daniels lit a cigarette and tried to think.

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The roar of the engine was a smooth baritone of power, vibrating through the ship.

FIVE minutes after he had lit his cigarette, Candy stopped sobbing, sat up and asked for a light.

"Good girl," Mo grinned at her, "ready to get out of here?"

"Whatever you say," she choked a little, "I'm sorry, Mo."

"Forget it. Here, take one of these and figure out how to get in it quickly in the water." He handed her one of the old, faded-blue life-jackets.

Then he went into the head and unscrewed the thick wooden head from a push broom. He began to hammer it against the nailed hatchway above their heads, using a mop to deaden the blows.

It was slow work, but finally one corner of the hatch gave a fraction of an inch. He used pushing, short blows, hoping that they would not echo or vibrate through to the bridge deck. Before he could see a quarter-inch indentation all around the wooden panel where it had started to give, his back and arms were aching from the strain of working straight up in the air. He estimated that almost an hour had passed before he thought to look at his watch. It was 11:52—close to the witching hour.

He went into the head again and dragged out the three five-gallon cans of alcohol or stove-fluid. He wasn't sure and he didn't care, because the labels plainly said "Keep Away from Fire."

"Look, Candy," he spoke soothingly but with emphasis, "when I knock out the hatch, I'm going to boost you up and out. You go over the side as fast as you can. If you can dive out and deep so much the better, don't forget the propeller blades."

Daniels admired the way she nodded. Her face said that she was scared—but she nodded.

"If we've come eight miles," he asked, "how far are we from some land?"

Candy's brows knit. "There's the channel—around the island and Wreckage Point—oh, about three or four miles anyway."

"O.K.," Mo grunted, and turned over one of the cans of stove-fluid. The stuff puddled around the deck, wet their feet and drained into the corners.

"No more smoking." He took Candy by one soft arm and stood her just forward of the ceiling hatch. Then he pounded with the broom. The oblong panel sprang up near its top, and Mo jumped on the lower bunk and forced it up and over.

He leaped to the deck and grabbed Candy, who helped by stepping on the bunk as he came down. Mo's two hundred pounds of bone and muscle hurled the girl up through the opening like a cork out of a champagne bottle pounded on its bottom.

The instant she was out of his hands he pulled two packs of matches from his coat pocket and leaped after her, setting fire to one of the packs in a one-handed flip as he went out the hatch. He burned his fingers, but the flaming pack went down the opening.

He rolled towards the bow, ready with the other packet, but a woosh of flame burst out of the hatchway. Around the cloud of fire and the burst of smoke that leaped after it he saw the glass splinter out of the boat-deck window where the wheel ought to be. A gun came through the opening, and he heard the blast of it as he rolled over the side of the cruiser and tried to embrace the cool water that rolled over his head.

THE passing of the propeller rocked Mo in the water, sending force waves sweeping across him. He stopped his depth-seeking breaststroke and floated to the surface.

The cruiser was thirty or forty yards away from him, turning gently to port as though her engine had stopped and there was no hand at the wheel.

Daniels could imagine Haskins and the thin detective hunting for fire-extinguishers. He hoped they were throwing water on the blaze and had their heads in the hatch when the other two cans let go.

He doubled up and let himself sink while he kicked off his shoes, coat and pants. Before releasing the trousers he stuck his wallet inside his shorts. When he surfaced the cruiser appeared to be stopped, with her forward end a mass of roaring flame.

As he watched two figures ran to the stern of the ship and dived into the water. Probably they had just thought of the gasoline tanks. Daniels turned and swam with an easy sidestroke away from the boat, along her trail where somewhere Candy Rizzo should be floating.

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"Candy."

The fourth time he called Mo received an answer. He had been swimming for about five minutes, riding each gentle swell and peering ahead. The call came from his left, and a moment's hard crawl brought him to the girl. She floated neck-deep, supported comfortably by the life-coat and its buoyant collar.

"Hi, Kid," he said, "lots of fun swimming at night, hey?"

Candy's lips chattered, but she returned his grin bravely.

"I never was so scared and c-c-cold in m-m-my life."

MO RESTED a gentle hand on the life-coat and began a search of the horizon, doing most of his staring during the short moments at the top of each rolling wave. He was not too sure which way the shore lay, but then he noticed that one portion of the blue bowl in which they were suspended was brighter than the rest.

He looked at the base of the bright section. On the fourth rise he saw a flicker of light, where the deeper blue of the sky changed to black. It could be a star—but it should be land.

"Come on, Sugar," he said, "let's see you paddle. We've got a long way to walk home."

"Shall I take the jacket off and swim?"

"Try it. I'll tow it and put you back into it when you want to rest."

Daniels spoke cheerfully, but a thread of worry crept up his spine as he noticed a certain dull weariness in the calves of his legs, felt a bit of effort as he stroked with his arms.

An hour passed—an hour of swimming and paddling and resting. Twice Daniels helped Candy into the life-coat, and towed her along in it while she paddled and rested.

The bright portion of the sky was much clearer, and he could definitely see flickers of light that must mark the shore, when Candy said, "I'm getting out of the jacket now, Mo, and I want you to put it on for awhile."

"Never mind," he said, "keep swimming."

She *stopped* swimming.

"Here it is," she said as she slipped through the canvas, "put it on or I stop right here."

Mo felt the dull weights that had become his legs, spat out a wavelet that slapped him in the face, and shrugged into the jacket. He relaxed, and felt delicious ease travel down his legs and arms as fresh blood began to remove tired muscle-poison.

"See," Candy watched him, "it doesn't matter if we make it an hour later—as long as we make it," and she swam gently along, trying to tow him by the collar.

IT WAS a good thing Daniels faced "astern" of their course, rather than toward the shore. On the peak of a wave he saw a black shape moving through the sea a few dozen feet behind them. He watched closely, and saw the phosphorescent glow of a hand!

"Go for the shore," he hissed at Candy as he struggled out of the jacket, "take this and keep going, Sugar."

"Why?" she demanded loudly, "I'm staying—"

A man's face loomed through the blackness, gurgling a curse or a threat as he came through the water toward them with the strong overhand strokes of a good swimmer. Daniels wondered if he swam for a certain distance and then floated awhile to keep fresh and rested. Candy gasped and stroked away as Daniels recognized the face of the thin detective. The man was a fish—his last overhand stroke became a long left that caught Daniels high on the head. There was not much power behind the blow, but he had no time to be thankful. The man's other hand followed the first and two wiry, strong sets of fingers closed on Daniels' throat.

With a lungful of air for insurance, Daniels sank in the cold, black water while he brought up his hands, locked together in an attitude of prayer, and doubled up his legs. The clawlike hands on his throat were getting into position to do some real damage when Mo thrust up his clasped hands, like a boxer greeting the crowd, and kicked with his legs.

His feet missed the man, but his orthodox stranglehold-breaking blow flipped the other's hands away from his throat like clothespins yanked off a line.

A hand grabbed his wrist as Mo stroked

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upward and filled his lungs with air. As he sagged lower in the water again he heard a gasping hiss which meant that the other man was filling his chest. Daniels wondered how much advantage weight was in water-polo. He wished he had played it a lot more.

The grip on his wrist became a vise-like lock as Mo deliberately tried to sink below the surface. Another hand felt for his hair or eyes, and he knocked it away as he rotated his wrist toward what he thought was the other's thumb. It must have been—the grip broke.

Mo put his arm around the other man's waist, pulling him towards himself until he could drive his right fist into the other man's stomach, using the arm locked as leverage.

He pounded viciously on the belly of the thin man, twisting, upward blows, aimed to make the man gasp—to make him choke or expel air—to reach his lungs and collapse them.

The water-logged forms drifted down in the black water, a twisting, writhing, silent mass of locked limbs and straining muscles.

Mo was helpless to protect the top of his head, and he felt a great wave of pain sweep down his spine as the man pulled what must have been a full handful of hair from his scalp. Clawing fingers tried to reach Mo's eyes, but he rolled his head violently against the hard, bony chest, trying to brush off the hands.

And he pounded. He worked his right arm like a piston, getting all the leverage he could from his grip around the man's back. He let go some air.

How long have we been down? Hit! Hit! Hit! Let's go a little more air! Hit!

The black shadows closed in. Deeper shadows than those of the surrounding water. It was time.

He had to stop slugging—as if he could strike another blow—and try for the surface. If the other man was still with him—he was finished.

Mo released his left arm and stroked feebly for the surface. He went away from hands that passed helplessly over him, as though in a farewell caress.

The first gulp of air was too quick, or a wave hit him in the face—he gasped and choked. He tried to swim and clear his throat—he could hardly do either. He gasped for air through a cotton rope that seemed to expand and fill his windpipe. The blackness wouldn't go away.

"Mo!" He felt a hand slap at his back, and something dragged up over his right arm. "Mo! Put your left arm in the hole. *Put your left arm in the hole!*"

It seemed like a good idea. He pushed his left arm at something, and then passed out for several seconds.

"Mo! Mo!" The voice was calling again from a distance. He drifted back into a world of cold and water. Someone was holding his head up while he floated in space. He coughed violently, from deep in his throat.

"Thanks, kid," he said as the mists cleared, and the black bowl began to have stars in it again, "that was close. Glad you stuck around."

THEY lay on the beach for what seemed like hours, until the glow of the dawn began to peep over the edge of the sea to the east. Mo, in shirt-tail, socks, and shorts, and Candy in a print dress that had molded in shrinking to a sheath for her figure, made an interesting picture.

"Say," Mo asked as he sat up and stretched, "was Haskins a good swimmer?"

"Sure, he was very good. Don't worry about him. I'll bet he either made the island or swam right for town."

"Then we've got to get going," Mo said. "Where are we?"

"About two miles north of Ryeport."

"Anywhere near Benjamin Root's?"

"Why, yes. We can walk there in ten minutes."

They padded through the soft sand that covered the seaward side of the headland, and danced over sharp stones and shells that hurt their feet until they reached the road.

Ben Root was cooking his breakfast when they reached the little house. A Model-A roadster was parked in the drive, and Daniels tooted the harsh horn. Ben looked through the kitchen window and waved with an egg-turner.

"Hi, young feller," he said when they stood inside the screen door. "Musta been some beach party."

"Nope," Daniels laughed, "boat accident."

"That right! Well," he looked Candy

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over, "you picked the right one to swim home with."

"Thanks, Ben," Candy said, "do I rate some coffee, too?"

The radio operator was reaching for more eggs in a bowl near the stove. "Coffee—bacon and eggs—browned potatoes—toast and real honey—we old-timers live well. I 'member once when I was workin' in Mexico—"

"Hold it, Ben," Daniels cut in, "I've got a job to do. Could you find an old pair of pants I could squeeze into so I could get to my hotel? Then run me down to my car. It's where Tony kept his boat."

Ben Root paused. "Now, that's right friendly. I offer you the finest breakfast—"

"Look, Ben," Daniels used his hands as he talked, "you said we young fellows are only interested in women and money. Now I'm tellin' you I want to do my job first. I'll pay you."

"Pay me nothin'." Ben Root poured three cups of coffee and pushed them at his guests. "After it's over, you and this pretty gal got to come back for a meal with me. Us old-timers get lonesome, and ain't often I meet another ham with your sense."

He left them drinking their coffee and went into another room. He returned with a pair of dungarees cut off and hemmed for shorts.

"Here," he cackled, "my little old legs would never match yours with pants, but I guess my belly is about as big. These shorts'll do ye."

THEY found Daniels' car where they had left it, undisturbed. Mo thanked Ben, renewed the promise of a visit, and left a protesting Candy Rizzo at her home with orders to keep the doors locked. Then he returned to his hotel.

The desk clerk smirked a bit at Daniels' appearance, but surrendered his key. Mo looked his room over carefully before stepping under the hot shower and soaping the salt from his body. The warmth of the bath soothed him until he could hardly keep his eyes open. Finally he ordered two pots of coffee from room service and told them to rush it up.

He had climbed into clean linen, a spare pair of gabardine slacks and a white sport shirt when the boy arrived with the coffee. Two quick cups gave him enough life to finish dressing, which included his spare gun, a Colt .25, tucked into the hip pocket of the slacks. A single white handkerchief concealed its shape and kept it in position.

The fresh break of a new day always gave Daniels a lift, and this one slapped him right in the face with a hot ball of sun that promised a scorcher. He whipped the V-8 into the drive beneath PD tower and skidded up the stairs.

The operator manning the tower—an isolated building along the Atlantic and Northern tracks—proved to be a lad Mo had met several times. A wiry youngster who worked from the spare board. He was glad to see Daniels—any company is welcome on lonely eight-hour tricks.

"Hi, Mo," he shouted, "wanna play some gin rummy?"

"Not now," Mo grinned at him, "anyway, you still owe me six-bits from last time we played, down in Cohasset."

"I'll pay yuh if you'll play with me," the other said plaintively. "This joint gets me down."

Mo slipped into the operator's seat before the desk with the telegraph instruments and telephones. "Not now, Perry, gotta talk to the chief."

He pressed the foot-pedal and spoke to the dispatcher when the line was quiet. "Hello, Boston, cut me through to Chief Liffy, please."

A second later the Chief's voice boomed from the receiver, dangling from the end of its wire headband.

"That you, Mo? Where the hell are yuh?"

Mo told him.

"What about this warrant?"

"What warrant?" Mo asked.

"You don't know," the Chief's tones leaped into the tower as Perry switched on the loudspeaker. "Haskins says you tried to kill him and one of his men. There's about nine charges to boot!"

"I see," Mo said calmly, "wait until he finds out I did kill one of his men."

"Great Scott!"

"Yeah," Mo echoed grimly, "but I don't think Haskins is going to do much charging when I get through with him."

"You got something on him?"

"I think so."

"You think so! You'd better get it before

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he gets you. Or you'll rot in the jug. Anyway, I've always trusted Haskins."

"I don't," Mo said. "You'd better come up here, Chief. It'll pop wide open soon. So 'long for now."

The loudspeaker roared. "Hello, Mo. Wait, Mo!"

"Tell him I've gone," Mo told Perry. The youngster did so, with relish.

Mo pulled from his pocket one of the papers on which he had written the string of letters received from Robinson at the FCC office. "Send me, boy," he said, "send me, Perry, and make me hear it."

The operator looked at the meaningless string of letters, shrugged, and plugged in on one of his quiet circuits.

"L BII EIEE5EEI," he said, "what kind of talk is that?"

"Send it," Mo said, and sat down wearily in the spare chair.

The youngster was good—you have to be on the spare board. He touched his bug with the fluttering touch of a hummingbird's wing. Sound flickered from his thumb and forefinger, ripped through the air and was gone.

"Hold it," Mo said, "send slow, with your fist, I can hardly read American Morse, anyway."

The operator repeated the letters, in slow Morse as clear as spoken words, clean-cut crystals of sound. Mo's feet hit the floor with a crash from their position on the switch levers.

"Am I hearing things!" he exclaimed. "I heard 'by ro er' in there somewhere, with an extra 'L' and a '5'."

Perry stared at the letters on the paper. "You're right," he said, "it's the timing. I can make 'by ro er' just by moving those E's and I's a bit closer in spacing the sound."

"Write it down," Mo barked as the operator reached for the key again, "never mind that key. Write down the symbols."

Perry wrote "L BY RO5ER"—and stared. "That's the way it could read," he said, "just the same."

Mo looked over his shoulder. "I'll be damned," he breathed, "in radio code, the Morse X is L and our string of dots for P comes out 5."

Perry fitted in the letters. "X BY ROPER," he said.

"Send it slow," Mo told him.

In clear American Morse, like a tone from the grave, the phrase ticked through the dusty tower—X BY ROPER—X BY ROPER—X BY ROPER.

"Crossed by Roper," Mo said softly. "When Cliff Freeman sent that last message he either wanted to save time—the Morse is a bit shorter—or more likely the battering on his skull somehow sent him back to the Morse with which he worked for so long."

The operator looked up. "So Johnny Roper killed Freeman," he said, "the four-flushing rat. Cliff was a good guy. I worked with him."

"Yeah," Mo said, still pondering, "and Cliff sent his last message in Morse, but there's not one op in a thousand on the air today to read it. The FCC lad was good. He copied it just the way it came—in International Code!"

MO WENT through the door. "Thanks," he shouted over his shoulder.

Ryeport Radio Station looked clean and businesslike when Daniels climbed out of the V-8 and rambled through the door. The new Packard was parked beside the entrance, but there were no other cars on the gravel. Johnny Roper sat at his watch station, listening to a set of traffic calls.

"Hello, Roper," Mo said flatly, "I've got some talking to do with you."

Roper looked up sharply at the tone. His youthful face whitened a little, and Mo noticed that there were weak lines in the jaw and chin which showed when the man relaxed.

"Yeah," he said, "that message Freeman sent before he died. You know about it, so don't stall. It said you killed him. A double-cross on a business deal."

Roper flipped off the loudspeaker switch and seemed to collapse in his chair, like a snowman hit by a blast of hot air.

"No," he almost whispered, "I read it. It didn't say anything. It couldn't have—"

"Shove it," Mo barked, "it was in American Morse. You know anything about it?"

"No."

"It was clean Morse, and it put the finger on you. I'm taking you in."

Roper looked down at the front of the receiver. "I've got friends," he muttered weakly, "I'll be all right."

"Yeah," Mo said. "If you mean that thin

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dick who was here. He's fish food and I put him there. If you mean Haskins, he told me to bring you in, and he'd rather I did it with a basket. He knows Freeman was an A. &. N. boy once, I think he wanted me to bump you. Maybe I will."

It was a long shot—but it spattered the target. Roper looked up, his face turning from thin white to a sick gray.

"He did! That's why he didn't call me last night—"

Mo thought—no, he was busy somewhere else—but he didn't say it.

"Look," Roper babbled, "Haskins was in this more than me. I've made him a fortune with export market stock tips I picked up off the air. I've spent hours decoding the stuff and passing it on. Then he figured out the dope business, and made me contact the ships. He's made millions, I bet, millions!"

"Sure," Daniels said, "that's why you took Cliff out in Root's boat and brought a load in. You just wanted to help—and pay for a new Packard and stuff. What'd you kill Cliff for?"

"He didn't know about the dope. When he found out he went soft. He mighta squealed. We had an argument—"

"So you bumped him," Mo murmured. "You thought with your connections everything would come off. You were the king of the roost. You could take a man's—"

"Never mind the lecture, Daniels!" The screen over a side window was kicked out with a crash. A Police Positive came into the room followed by one of Haskins' legs. Mo stood still.

THE city detective clambered over the sill, but his gun stayed on Daniels. Mo did not move—hardly breathed. He knew Haskins would *like* to kill him.

"Take his gun, Johnny."

The operator did, with a faint sneer.

"Give it to me," Haskins barked.

The operator handed it over.

"Now get over beside him," the gun swung briefly at Roper, "I heard part of your gab, you cheap punk."

Johnny said, "No, Paul, no! I was tryin' to help—"

"Shut up!"

The operator sank against a transmitter beside Daniels. The station was deadly quiet.

Minutes passed. "Can I smoke?" Daniels asked softly.

"No!"

The smooth motor of a powerful car came purring toward the station. There was the double slam of doors and two men came into the room. They were big, heavy, and wore suits that might have come from Park Avenue. The shorter of the men greeted Haskins.

"Hello, Paul. I see you made it. This the guy?"

Daniels figured them as two high-class hoods. Probably part of the gang that Haskins passed along his goods to—possibly his wholesale drops.

"Yes. These two birds have gotta take the deep dive. We can pull out of this okay, like I told you."

The larger of the men unlimbered a Colt .45, and the shorter, who seemed to be the leader, spoke casually, "Bump 'em here?"

"Might as well, Rudy," Haskins said, "this big guy is slippery as hell."

The man with the .45 looked expectant. Daniels' stomach tied itself up in knots.

"Just one thing," he said calmly, not at all the way he felt, "I've telegraphed Boston the story on Haskins and Roper. Sorry I didn't know about you, Rudy."

The stocky man looked at him, with a cold stare that would have gone well on a dead shark. "So," he said thoughtfully, you did, eh? We can cross that bridge when we come to it."

"Paul!" Roper broke in with a scared whine, almost a scream. "Daniels killed Harry. He said he did."

Haskins' heavy brows shot up. "Huh," he grunted, "that's one less mouth to worry about, after we shut yours."

"You can't shut all the mouths," Daniels said, "you're just digging your pit deeper. There's a dozen people know about you now."

Haskin shrugged. "I'm a gambler. I'm in a big game after selling other people's peanuts. I'll take my chances."

"This oughta be quick," the short man said. "Let's walk 'em out to the car. Easier than carryin' 'em."

"Get going," the big man waved his free hand but not the .45. He evidently figured he would have to do the carrying, and preferred to handle meat on the hoof.

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Johnny Roper stumbled out of the door. Daniels quickly followed him—slammed the screen door behind him without looking and ran like a deer for the beach!

HOW fast can you sprint when you've had no sleep for 36 hours, and your legs are still weary and stiff from a five-mile swim? Daniels didn't know, but he did his best. Head down, arms swinging, legs driving like locomotive side-rods into the soft sand that was at best a poor foothold. He ran for about forty feet and then pivoted about 15 degrees to the right.

"Blam!" The forty-five crashed as the big man smashed his way through the screen door. The shot missed as Daniels changed his course and the big man steadied for another shot like a marksman firing a target course.

"Blam!" The big man stumbled and cursed—Haskins and the man called Rudy had burst out the door and knocked him off his stance.

Daniels heard the second shot and counted ten steps with his pounding feet—ten driving strides that ate up the open beach in forty-inch chunks. He twisted to his left and tried to put a slight rise of sand between himself and the radio station.

"Hold it," he heard Haskins say. "We'll box him in and take him."

For the first time Mo chanced a look back. The three men were 100 yards behind him, clustered in front of Johnny Roper, who cowered against the station wall like a trapped butterfly.

He saw Haskins trot out to the right and the big man with the .45 to the left, down the legs of a triangle that would box him in against the beach. He saw Haskins raise his Police Positive, and he bent almost double as he went over the headland and came suddenly to the open sea.

Daniels looked at the water and then up at the low, sandy hillocks to his right and left. If he stayed here, Haskins and the big man would close in over those shell-strewn slopes. If he swam out, it would be easy to take the station rowboat and catch him. Anyway, he was in no shape for a fast swim.

Suddenly he bent almost double again and raced down the beach toward his left. Even as he ran for his life he could not help noticing what a grand day it was. All golden, warm sun and rich blue water and inviting sand. A marvelous day to die!

"Blam!" He twisted to the right and glanced back. It was the big man, fifty yards behind him and running hard! Another figure running behind the man with the .45 must be Haskins.

He had crossed the leg of the triangle! A .45 was effective for good shooting up to twenty-five yards—but the automatic must have at least four slugs left in it. One lucky shot would— He glanced to the right. The big black car was moving away from the radio station!

Daniels looked ahead. The beach wound in and out, but formed an inlet that cut back almost to the road a mile in front of him. The short man called Rudy must have knocked Roper on the head and was driving down to cut him off!

HE GLANCED back as he leaped across a hillock of shell and stone and splashed through the water to save distance on a turn. The big man was still coming strong. The distance looked about the same.

Daniels hurled himself over a clay and marsh-grass embankment and thundered across a level space about 100 feet long, ending in another rise. He saw a battered dory lying bottom up on the mound ahead.

He looked down and back. Even in the hard sand his thudding feet made definite imprints. He had to leave a trail for the man to follow.

He cleared the next rise in a flying scissors hurdle, then flung himself on the sand and wormed to the right toward the dory's hulk, scrambling across the damp sand.

He felt quietly for a piece of the wreckage to use for a weapon—every piece he touched was still firmly attached or crumbled in his grip. Like a burrowing dog he crept closer to the salt-smelling wood.

Thudding steps sounded along the beach, and the big man came scrambling across the rise to his right. Before he noticed the disordered sand where Daniels had thrown himself down and crawled sideways, the man was running again, with Daniels pounding twenty feet behind him!

The sound or the lack of a trail caused him to slow—Daniels flew up on his right side, catching the .45 with a scooping grab of his own right hand and forcing the man's

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arm and gun back over his right shoulder.

The grip was good—the man screamed as his forefinger broke.

Two crushing blows of the gun put the big man down on the sand like a brained ox.

Daniels scrambled back up the rise to see Haskins hurtle over the sand-dune a hundred feet away, Police Positive in his hand. The city detective had shed his coat and ripped open his tie and shirt collar. There was murderous purpose on his face, a look that changed to surprised anger and then to bitterness as he stumbled to a stop and shouted hoarsely, "Daniels!"

Both men swayed back and forth, their breathing far louder than the sounds of the breaking surf and the screeching of disturbed sea gulls.

"Drop it, Haskins," Mo barked between panting gasps for air. "Drop it."

The local man straightened up, shook himself as though to find fresh power in his tortured leg muscles, and began to walk toward Daniels.

Mo shrugged, set the .45 firmly in his right hand, and stepped out himself.

Across the sand the two men closed in on each other, slowly, steadily. Mo thought that he would like to swap guns with the other, he'd rather shoot out a duel or a target match with a .38 pistol anytime than with a clumsy .45. Too late for that—Haskins probably knew his gun well, too—shot it on the range—

NINE steps—ten steps—Daniels counted them. On the thirteenth step he brought up the heavy cannon and held the sights on the center of Haskins' chest as he walked. It wasn't a pretty way to fight—you'd never sell action like that to the movies—you looked like a fencer who'd forgotten his foil.

Daniels was taking short, mincing steps, his left hand out behind him for balance as he kept the sights of the heavy cannon centered on Haskins.

The city dick laughed. He carried his own gun at his hip, held firmly and aimed—he looked a lot better than Daniels that way.

"Whattsa matter, Mo," he called, "you scared?"

On the sixteenth step Mo started squeezing the trigger—and felt the lift of the gun as it fired an instant later. Haskins went a step backward and sat down. Then his head fell forward onto his knees.

"Damn," Mo gasped, "I'll never—I'll never call a .45 a chunk of iron again. It does stop a man cold."

He staggered up the headland and looked around for the sedan. The man called Rudy saw him, stared for a minute, and then jumped into the big car and hurtled away.

AN HOUR later the Ryeport Radio Station was really jammed with men. Terence Liffy finally got Mo into the battery room and shut the door.

"Man," he said, "you sure ironed this case out! Is that report you wrote out for the Staties the whole story?"

"Yeah," Mo said, "except that this case is gonna take some tying up. I mean—find out from what stations boxes of dope have been shipped over the A. & N.—see if Haskins and Company used our wires for their deals. "Help the Staties find Rudy. Charge Roper."

The chief moved his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. "Yeah," he said, as though he understood, "I see. Uh—is that important."

"Sure—I can take care of it in about a week. Right here in Ryeport."

Terence Liffy scratched his head. "All right—all right, it's your case."

He went back into the radio room to take some more bows for the press—after all, he was the chief of the outfit that cracked the case.

But a few minutes later, when a beautifully built girl with hair the color of polished blueberries came in—and left almost at once accompanied by Mo Daniels, the chief began to mutter.

"A week," he said, "a week he wants up here."

He turned to one of the local uniformed men. "Say," he asked, "who was that girl with Daniels?"

"Candy Rizzo," the cop told him, "she figured in the case. It was her brother that was charged with the kill at first."

Liffy snorted again, "A week!"

Then he grinned, shrugged, and went on talking about the case.

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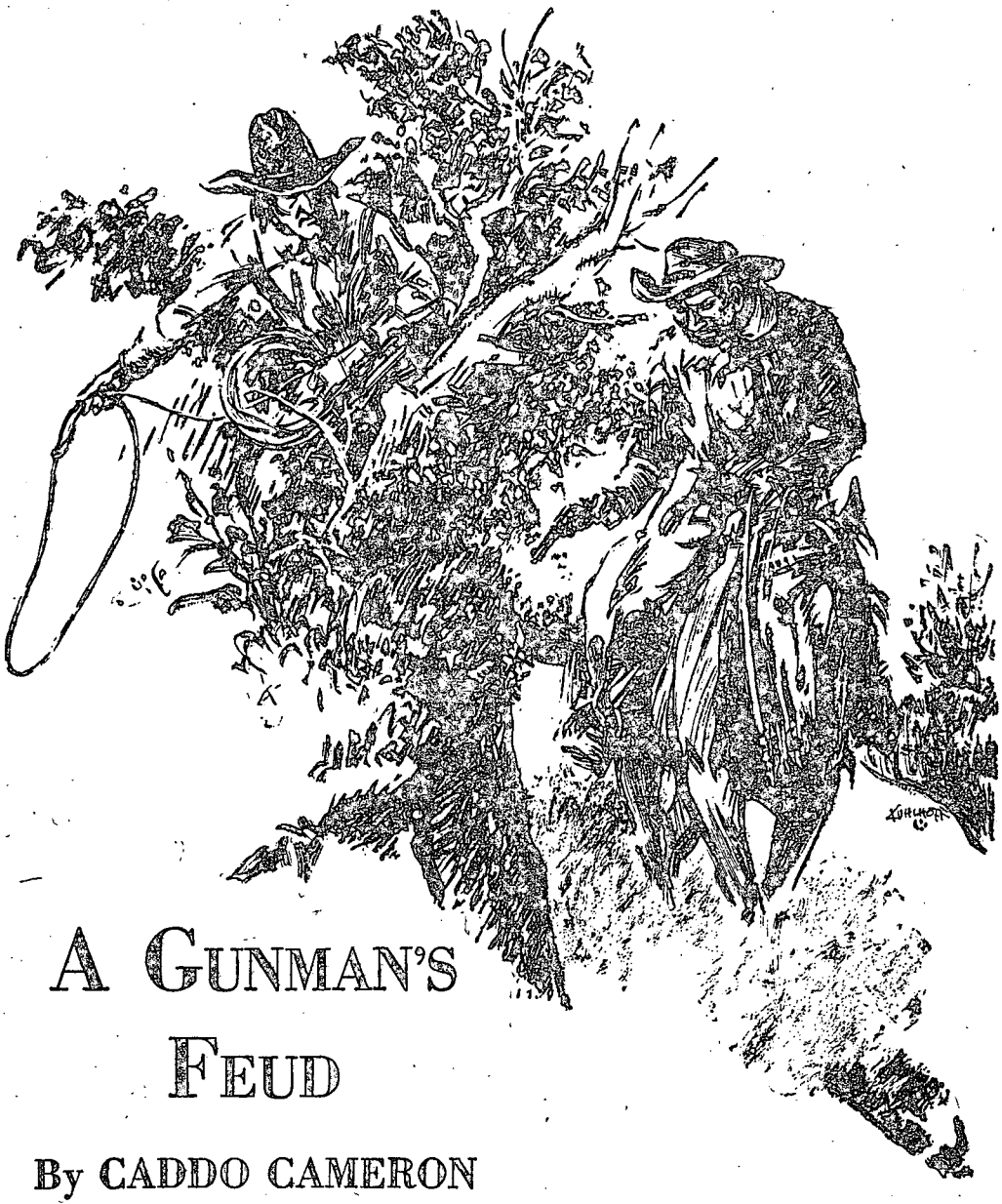

A GUNMAN'S FEUD

By CADDO CAMERON

LOTS OF FOLKS work six days in the week and rest on the seventh like we're all supposed to do. Trouble with some of them is, they put in six days doin' their damndest to get the best of the other fella by hook or crook and on the seventh they make out to be so all-fired good they've got a right to tell everybody else how to behave. An outlaw myself, I certainly ain't got no call to talk about nobody. But that don't keep me from sayin' that after bein' condemned by these six-day sinners and one-day saints, I'd rather tangle with a tough customer who looks me in the eye and admits that he's a seven-day sinner and aims to do me dirt if he can. Met up with one of them a while back. He's an outlaw and he dealt me a heap of misery, too.

It happens like this.

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One hot evenin' down in Old Fort Griffin, Texas, I've got my six-foot-six propped against the front end-bar in Meyer's Saloon with a bottle of cold beer in easy reach, and I'm havin' what's big fun for a man who likes company and don't have much of it because he's more or less on the dodge all the time. There's a right sociable bunch in here, nobody tight. We've been puttin' up old head and swappin' jokes, and we're framin' a badger fight with a tenderfoot Saint Louie drummer to pull the badger. Meantime, of course, I've got an adobe wall at my back and I'm keepin' an eye on all doors and windows. In my business, if you ever forget to do that you don't live long. There's lots of folks on the street today and they're movin' up and down outside, but nobody seems to be particularly interested in me except those who take a second look at my hawk face and long black hair and I'm used to that. After a while, though, a fella stops well back from the front window and takes a powerful good look at me.

I go right on talkin' and laughin', but one false move from him and I'll be grabbin' iron before I know it. A man gets that way, you know. Pretty soon he disappears from the window and shows up at the front door, ten feet away on my right.

This stranger mighty nigh fills that door, too, and I'll swear it looks like somebody had taken a big brown rock six foot tall and put it there on the threshold. He's that solid and hard, no foolin'. The man is mean, yes—it sticks out all over him, but it's the brand of meanness that makes a fella able to stand up under any kind of hardship or danger and take a heap of killin' when it comes his time to die. Nothin' sly or slippery about him and I'll gamble that there ain't a hypocritical hair on him. He walks over to me and his bootheels come down slow and positive on the board floor. I notice that he's takin' pains to keep his hand well away from his holster. Seems that the other boys suspicion somethin' is about to come off, for they all stop talkin' and a few move to where they can see better.

The stranger stops within four feet of me, and asks in a low and easy voice, "Are you Slim Gunman?"

I can draw mighty nigh as well with my left, so I put out my right hand. "Yes, sah, that's what most folks call me. I didn't quite catch your name?"

I might better have kept my hand at home. He don't even look at it. Without liftin' his deep voice, he goes on, "I'm Jake Lawrance. Does that mean anything to you?"

"Yes, it does," I answer quiet. "A year or so ago I had trouble with a man by the name of Lawrence and I heard that he had a brother. I'd never take you to be *his* brother, though."

While it ain't a bit harsh, his voice somehow sounds as hard as he looks, "Well, I *am* Bob Lawrence's brother. You killed him, didn't you?"

"Sorry to say that I did," I admit. "Bob Lawrence was so damned fast I had to hit him anywhere I could. Been a fool to try to place my shot. Plumb lucky that he didn't get me."

He settles his weight onto one leg and folds his arms across his big chest. Jake Lawrence's gray eyes are like ice now. "I've been out in the Rockies and didn't get word of Bob's killin' until three months ago," he says. "Since then I've come East and trailed you all the way from up in The Osage Reservation without ever runnin' onto you until today. D'you know why I've been huntin' you?"

"Hard to tell. Lots of men have hunted me."

"I've been huntin' you, Mistah Gunman," he says slow and clear, "so as to get square for Bob. That's the way we do back in the Smokies where the Lawrences are born and bred. First chance I get, I'm goin' to kill you."

Now, ain't that hell? I could like this hard case without half tryin'. He's got sand in his craw and iron in his soul. He's a fella you'd like to have along when you point a herd of longhorns into big water, and he's a man to have at your back when you're corralled by trouble and there ain't no way out. Maybe he has a twist in his head about feuds, but this Jake Lawrence is *all man* regardless. Some fella moves his foot and a spur jingles and damned if it don't make a noise in the room. Grates on my nerves. This ain't the first time I've had a man tell me that he aimed to kill me, but I've never heard a man like Jake Lawrence say it the way he did.

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"Mighty square of you to talk right out thisaway, Lawrence," I tell him, "but I ain't got nothin' against you. Fact is, I kinda like your looks. I'd a heap rather not have trouble with you. If anybody tells you that I didn't give Bob Lawrence an even break. they're dirty liars."

He speaks up quick, "Nobody did. Everybody swears that Bob crawled you and you waited for him to make his play. But that don't make no difference. He was my brother. Us Lawrences stick together. My dad and granddad brung us up thataway. So I'll kill you first chance I get."

This calls for some fast thinkin'. I tilt my bottle and take a big swallow of beer. Nothin' more I can say. No way out of it, I reckon, but it's a damned shame to have to fight a man like Jake Lawrence on account of a dirty and snaky killer like his brother Bob.

I SET my bottle down, grin at Jake, and drawl, "Mighty sorry you feel this way about it, but as long as you do, now's your chance, Mistah. Unloose your dogs!"

Maybe I'm wrong, but seems like warmth from the inside of him melts a little of the ice in his eyes. But he shakes his head slow, and says quiet, "You're wrong. This ain't no chance for me. They say I'm pretty good, but I know that man-to-man I wouldn't stand a ghost of a show with you. I've got to get square for Bob. Lettin' you kill me won't do it."

"Hell, man! I don't want to kill you. How d'you aim to go about gettin' square—if it's a fair question?"

Jake Lawrence looks me in the eye, and answers, "I won't take chances with you. I'll corral you with my boys, or better still, I'll cut you down when you ain't lookin'. If I can frame you so that the law takes and hangs you, that would suit me fine because you'll suffer more thataway."

"D'you mean to say you'd bushwhack a man?"

"If he had killed a Lawrence—yes. Anything to get square."

This stops me. First time I ever tangled with a man like Jake. "You'll heft as much as me, maybe more, and you ain't a-packin' no taller. We'll shed our hardware and fight it out fist and skull."

Again he shakes his head. "Nope, won't do. I couldn't kill you with my bare hands and I've got to do it to get square."

"With knives you'd have an even break," I tell him. "Let's us fight with knives and get it over with."

A mutterin' runs through the room and several men are shakin' their heads at me. A knife ain't my weapon. I hate 'em.

"If you hadn't killed a Lawrence, Gunman, you wouldn't be a bag egg," declares Jake, "but you did and I've got to get square. Can't take chances on gettin' square for Bob. Knives might give me an even break, but I don't want an even break. I want the best of it. I've got to make certain that you lose. I've got to kill you."

I simply don't savvy a man like him. I frown, and ask, "If you figuré I'm so all-fired mean with a six-shooter, ain't you afraid to stand up to me and say the things you've said?"

"Nope, I ain't afraid of you that way," he answers honest and open. "They tell me that you never make a break until the other man does. I don't aim to make no breaks while you're lookin'."

As I was sayin', I'm all through—stumped complete. So I tell him, "Then have it your way, Mistah. Just recollect that I'm lookin' most all the time and I'll do my damndest to keep a whole hide . . . Billy, the drinks are on me! Make your nominations, boys! What'll it be, Jake?"

Little cracks and crevasses show in the rock hardness of his face. "Sorry, Gunman. I won't drink with you because I aim to kill you. But when you're dead, I'll buy a drink for your corpse and drink it myself. *Adios!*"

Jake Lawrence turns his back to me and walks out.

Ain't it hell?

IN THE next two weeks I get around some. There's one or more men on my trail every foot of the way after I leave Camp Griffin and what I mean, I'm cat-eyed day and night, awake and asleep. It was this way when the law first took out after me a long time back, but I'd got over it to the point where a barefooted mouse wouldn't wake me from a sound sleep—then I had to tangle with Jake Lawrence and he's got me on set trigger again. This takes a lot out of a man, too, cuts the beef

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off'n him, makes him meaner than ever. Jake started in to gettin' square the minute he made his talk and if he don't make an open break of some kind pretty soon, I'll get so it's plumb dangerous to walk up behind me without whistlin' when you're a long ways off.

From Texas I've headed back to The Nations figurin' to make my way to The Osage Reservation in the Northeastern part of The Territory. I used to live with the Osages and was adopted by them with full tribal rights. They're my friends and it won't be healthy for these trailers to dog my tracks in that Reservation. Of course, I could lose Jake and his men in this country where I know mighty nigh every rabbit run and wolf trail there is, but I take him to be a man who won't turn loose of an idea when he gets it and he's certain to cut my sign again. Or I could find a good place and stop and shoot it out with him. Somehow or other, though, I don't want to fight Jake Lawrence. He's cracked about family feuds and such, but that's his bringin' up and after all the trouble I've had with lyin' hypocrites I sure cotton to a man who's got the honesty and nerve to tell me to my face what he thinks of me and what he aims to do about it. So here I am across the Red in the Chickasaw Nation and still stumped. Meantime, I ain't gettin' no sleep to speak of. Looked at myself in a branch this mornin' when I went to wash my face. Godamighty! No wonder little Indian kids run and hide at sight of me, and old folks who know me want to take and doctor me up with herbs and the like.

I camp last night on Caddo Creek a little ways below some rough country called the Arbuckle Mountains. Early this mornin' I climb a tall tree with my little brass spyglass and after a while I spot five riders a-circlin' and cuttin' for sign on all sides of me. They know I holed up somewhere in this general neighborhood durin' the night. The only one that's gettin' sorta hot is a fella on a bay horse and he's a-workin' his way up the creek towards my camp slow and careful, in and out of timber so that I don't get a good look at him until he's too damned close. It's Jake Lawrence himself!

Hell of a situation. I can go and hide and stick Jake up, or I can jump out on him sudden so that he'll go for his gun and maybe give me a chance to put an end to this fool man-hunt of his'n. I *could* make a run for it, too. Now that Old Blaze has gone to his Happy Huntin' Ground, I'm a-ridin' my blue horse and except for Blaze I ain't never seen Blue's beat in a long, goin'-away race. But damned if I want to run. I'm meaner and I've got more cussedness in me than I had when I met up with Jake down in Texas. Besides, he's dealin' me misery and I've got a little gettin' square of my own to do.

I get out of the tree quick, grab my catch-rope and hit a high trot down the creek afoot. Pretty soon I come to a clump of dense bushes with an openin' behind it and not tall enough to interfere when I stand up to make my cast, and it's about the right distance from the animal trail that Jake will be ridin'. I can hear his horse's hoofs a-rustlin' leaves, now, and the creak of his saddle leather. He's comin' slow—has to because I waded Blue up the creek a mile or so, dodgin' mud banks as much as I could, which makes our sign hard to follow, even for a good tracker like Jake evidently is. Hope none of his four men take a notion to give up circlin' and hit straight for the timber on the creek.

With my hat off and peekin' through the bushes I see Lawrence comin' at a walk. He's saddle-weary and a-needin' sleep, too, and looks more'n ever like a big brown rock that has stood the weather for years and won't never wear out. I'm hopin' that I got the breeze right so that his horse won't catch my scent. It don't—goes right on past me. Jake has his head turned the other way, lookin' down at the creek. I stand up without a sound, make a quick cast of a small loop. My luck runs out on me. At the instant the loop went home Jake lifted his right hand to his hat. The rope snapped shut around his body, nailed his left, but his right arm is free!

His horse lunges forward. I'm dug in solid. The hard-twist rope lifts him from the saddle like his hundred ninety pounds ain't nothin' at all. Notwithstandin' he's caught cold by surprise, he half-spins in the air, whips out his six-shooter and slams a bullet that damned nigh climbs down the rope to me. It coughs its breath in my ear!

Jake falls mighty hard and lands like the solid rock he is. I'm on top of him

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before he can move a finger, stunned as he is. He can't talk with his voice, but his face and eyes are things to be afraid of. A few quick hitches and he's tied temporary. His horse has halted a short distance away. I hurry and get his rope and trot back. Jake can talk now.

He looks me in the eye, and says low and cold, "You win, Gunman. Finish the job. Get it over with. *I* would."

I'm busy a-tyin' him good with his own rope. "I don't do business thataway."

"Why not?"

"I reckon every man behaves accordin' to his raisin', unless he changes for better or worse," I answer. "There you are, Jake. Unless somebody comes along and turns you a-loose, you're hitched solid until it rains puppy dogs in the Panhandle. I'll drop you down here on this sandbar where you can roll over and get you a drink without fallin' into deep water. Sorry I can't stay and visit. More'n likely some of your boys heard that shot, so I gotta ramble now. So 'long."

Jake Lawrence can take it. That fall hurt him and I've hoo-rawed him a plenty, but there's a grin in his eyes. Then he frowns thoughtful like he don't savvy me any better than I savvy him.

I AIN'T never saddled up, broke camp and got away any quicker than I do now. Down the creek a short distance beyond Jake I climb another tree with my spyglass. Before I get to the top, three shots roll up stream with the breeze! I take a quick look. Don't need the glass. Through a break in the timber less'n half a mile away I catch sight of a rider comin' hell-bent. He must've been where he could hear Jake's shot and locate it on the creek, and he has picked up Jake's trail. Now, he has signaled the others to come a-runnin'. If I leave the creek to dodge him I'll show myself to them, so the only thing to do is to go past him or over him.

No place to hide my horse and let this rider go by, but I take cover in brush beside the trail and wait for him. Passin' under a limb he has slowed to a high trot, when I stand up sudden.

"H'ist 'em!" I bark. "Quick!"

He won't. He sets his black down and goes for his gun simultaneous. With his horse a-r'arin' up and him droppin' towards its far side, about all I've got to shoot at is his head, shoulder and arm. My bullet knocks him out of the saddle. He'll pack a busted shoulder for a while. His gun is still in its holster and he lets it stay.

I hurry over there. He's a wild and reckless young devil, but he ain't really a bad lookin' cuss at that. "Sorry, Mistah," I tell him, "but down here in The Nations, when a man behind a gun says 'Stick 'em up!' you'd better mind him. Jake is on a sandbar up yander a short piece. Give him my regards when you see him, will you? So 'long."

I head for the rough country. On the way I buy grain for my horse and grub for me from Chickasaw farmers, then go into the hills and hole up to rest Old Blue and myself. I've fouled my trail a-plenty and don't think Jake Lawrence can track me here. Hope he doesn't. But I won't kill up a good horse to get out of a fight with him.

AN HOUR before sundown ten days later, without havin' seen hide nor hair of Jake and his men, I ride into Muskogee away up in The Creek Nation. Directly I run onto Oily Ollinger, the medicine man. He has camped his wagon on vacant ground not far from the twelve-foot stockade that surrounds the Federal Jail and he's a-peddlin' Chief Wahoomonga's Snake Oil to a gatherin' of Indians, Negroes and white men who buy the stuff because he guarantees it to be death on every misery from bullet wounds to wood ticks. Oily is a fat little crook, but he's a friend of mine—swears I done him a big favor once by savin' his life from a drunk buffalo hunter. He never forgets anything—Oily doesn't, and us fellas outside the law can give him a message for somebody and he'll recollect it until he meets up with the man while knockin' around over the country, then he delivers the message word-for-word, which is a heap safer for us than goin' into a post-office. We call him The Office. Whenever Oily tips us off to somethin' good he gets his cut, too.

I stand back until he spots me over the heads of the crowd. His round face goes plumb serious all of a sudden and he gives me the sign that he's got somethin' for me. Must be all-fired important from the

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looks of him. I slide away and get Old Blue and tie him in a handy clump of trees, then hunker down there to wait. When Oily winds up his pitch and climbs down from the tailboard and the crowd scatters, I drift over to the wagon.

"Slim, I'm damned glad to see you!" he busts out, soft and breathless. "You heard about the killin' of Tom Jones and his wife last week?"

"No-o! Who'd be dirty enough to kill Old Tom Jones and Molly?"

Oily shrugs. "Somebody did and four men are ready to swear that *you're the murderer!*"

"WHAT? Talk—man!"

"The killer went into their house and shot them down in cold blood. Tom didn't have a weapon on him when they found them." Oily looks under and behind the wagon cautious, mops his face with a green silk handkerchief, and goes on, "Down at Eufaula yesterday Turtle Thomas heard a man tell Deputy Marshal Bully Smith that he and three other men saw you kill Tom and his wife. What's more—this man told the Deputy that he and his friends would take the stand and swear that they saw you do it. That's bad Slim, *awful bad*. You know Bully Smith. He's in Muskogee now, shooting off his face about how he'll slap you in jail or put you under ground."

I nod. "Yes, I know Bully Smith."

This new Deputy U. S. Marshal is so orney and crooked I ain't usin' his real name. The Deputies who ride for Old Isaac C. Parker, The Hangin' Judge of the Federal Court in Fort Smith, are hard men, but they're square men and the man I'm callin' "Bully Smith" ain't fit to ride with them. They say he got on the force through political pull. He's tryin' to make a name for himself as a gunfighter and to do it he has shot men in the back, then yelled, "Hands Up!" He won't last long, but in the meantime he can cause me a hell of a lot of trouble.

I ask, "Who is this fella that was talkin' to Smith?"

"He's a newcomer to The Nations," answers Oily. "I've only met him twice. They tell me that he's a big road agent from California and the Rockies, and I hear that he's a bad man to monkey with. His name is Jake Lawrence."

"Umm-huh. Did Turtle hear anything else?"

"Plenty, but I don't know whether it's any good," answers Oily. "Turtle says it's being whispered around that the real Jones murderer is Pawnee Ike."

"Huh! That breed."

Pawnee Ike is one of the genuine bad men of The Nations. He's got blood of at least three colors in his veins, he's mighty mean with six-shooter or knife, and there ain't nothin' that's too dirty for him to do. This Jones murder fits him perfect. But the rumor don't ring true. Such things are whispered through the underworld, all right, but nine times out of ten the whisperin' don't start so soon after the crime. Everybody lays mighty low for a while.

Oily is watchin' me, sayin' nothin'. I roll me a smoke and do some fast thinkin'. Naturally, I'm on the lookout for a trap and maybe I'm overly suspicious. Any outlaw knows that I would know where to go to look for Pawnee Ike. Could it be that Jake Lawrence tried to give me a scare by lettin' it be known he had talked thataway to the Deputy, then he starts the whisperin' about Pawnee Ike, figurin' that I'll go after Pawnee so's to clear myself? . . . Could be. . . . And when I go to Pawnee's hangout, Jake and his boys are layin' for me? That could be, too. I'll gamble that Jake wants to wipe me out himself, rather than to see the law hang me. That's human nature—at least, it's *his* kind of human nature.

I get up. "Well, I'm shore much obliged, Oily. When you see Turtle Thomas tell him that I owe him money, or somethin' just as good. Reckon I'd better mosey along now."

TURNIN' to leave, I catch sight of that damned twelve-foot stockade again. Somehow, I can't drag my eyes away from the thing. I know what's behind it—been there with a murder charge tacked onto me, a thing I didn't do, just waitin' to be moved to Fort Smith for trial in a court from which there is no appeal, then a hangin' by Old Maledon. My friend, Deputy Marshal Heck Henderson, found the real murderer and saved my neck. Now, I'm a-lookin' right through that high fence at the cells or barracks, as they call 'em, and I can see myself locked behind two-inch lumber covered with sheet iron again. *And*

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for the murder of Old Tom Jones and Molly. Hell! He's the last man in the world I'd ever think of shootin', and the woman —Godamighty! Tom Jones was a Deputy Marshal and a good one. He married a Creek girl and went to farmin' out in Arkansaw River bottoms not far from Muskogee. Like all good officers in this wild country, Tom made a heap of enemies.

No tellin' how long I stand here behind Oily's wagon, just a-lookin' at that damned stockade and thinkin'—I dassn't let Bully Smith arrest me. The killin' happened while I was holed up down in the Arbuckles and I'd never be able to prove that I was there and not here. I wouldn't have a ghost of a show in court with four men testifyin' that they saw me do it. Hell's Fire! *I dassn't let anybody arrest me!*

Take this rumor about Pawnee Ike bein' the real murderer. Maybe Jake aims to bait a trap for me with it, but maybe Pawnee Ike *is* the killer. I remember when Tom Jones shot Pawnee's trigger-finger off so that he had to learn to sling a gun all over again, and got to be faster than ever. Pawnee could be the man, all right. He hangs out at Muskogee May's eatin' house north of town a short piece, where a man can buy him a slug of rotgut if he's known or spoke for. Well, I'd rather take chances on Jake's trap than to be arrested, or forced to gun an officer to keep from it.

I build me another cigarette with my eyes mostly on that damned stockade. If Bully Smith is lookin' for me he ain't a-huntin' very hard. Inside the last hour I've been seen by several men who know me. Maybe he's waitin' until dark so's to plug me when I don't see him, then claim it was a fair fight. Sun's down and he won't have long to wait.

Hold on a minute! I've got an idea that will either solve my problem of the trap, or put me out of my misery. I'll just fade away until dark, then come back and get this gun-slingin' Deputy and carry him with me to Muskogee May's!

WE'VE GOT a full moon and he's out of his blankets early tonight. When I drop by Oily's wagon the little medicine man is fillin' his coaloil torch and there ain't nobody around. He says that Bully Smith is a-settin' in a stud game with some freighters and traders over in Wilson's Wagon Yard.

That's where I go, takin' pains not to be seen on the way.

The poker game is between two covered wagons not far from the corral gate. Six men are sittin' around a blanket on the ground and that many more standin' up, watchin' the players. Lanterns are hung on the wagons and it's plenty light in there, but I'm able to walk right up to the circle of men before anybody notices me. Now, I make it a point not to show off my gun-play, for it goes against the grain to see a fella do that and besides, there ain't no percentage in it; but this is once when I'm thinkin' that I'd ought to give a man a lesson on how to sling a six-shooter, providin' I can. If he's made to look foolish before all these men he may try to salve his pride by takin' the dare I aim to throw at him.

I've halted behind the onlookers, directly opposite Bully Smith. He's a burly cuss with Wild West yellow hair a-hangin' to his shoulders and a whoppin' big mustache hard-twisted at its ends, and damned if he ain't packin' a pearl Colt! The fella in front of me glances back and up. His eyes open wide, he mumbles somethin' to those near him and right quick there ain't nobody between me and the Deputy but a couple of players with their backs to me. They hear the scuffle, look around, throw themselves right and left out of the way. Meantime, Bully was shufflin' the cards, lifts his eyes to mine, jumps up quick for a man his size.

I tell him quiet and plumb cold, "They say you're lookin' for me. What d'you want?"

I'll swear Bully Smith is scared stiff, but maybe I'm enough to scare anybody—unshaved and ganted up the way I am. He's a-hangin' onto the deck with both hands like he's fixin' to deal cards. He turns loose of the pack slow. In the split-second that I see his fingers move before they let go of the cards I put everything I've got into a draw that was pretty fast, I reckon. The big Deputy is lookin' popeyed down the throat of my six-shooter like he doesn't believe it could happen that quick.

"Take care!" I snap. "If you're the gun-fighter you make out to be, you'd oughta

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know better than to move a finger thataway unless you aim to make your play."

Men are mutterin' all around us now and I hear some low cussin'.

"And another thing," I go on, "if you're figurin' to arrest me for the murder of Tom Jones and his wife you'll have to shoot me in the back or beat me to the draw."

"I'm grandstandin' to beat hell and ashamed of myself, but I holster my six-shooter and fold my arms. "All right, Marshal. You're bragged about how you'll arrest me, or put me under ground. How will you go about it—bushwhackin', or gun-to-gun—now?"

He ain't had much chance to talk. Been doin' it all myself. But Bully has kind of got his balance and is fixed to say somethin'.

"When I get ready to arrest you, Gunman," he growls, "I'll do it legal. Where was you when the Jones killin' come off?"

"A-hidin' out in the Arbuckle Mountains," I answer short. "Tom Jones and Molly were my friends. I aim to find the man who murdered them. Have you got the guts to ride alone with me while I go and hunt him? Tonight—right away."

There ain't a particle of doubt that Bully Smith is a coward, but he's as proud as a peacock and sometimes an overage of pride makes up for a shortage of nerve. He's a-straddlin' the fence now, so I give him a shove in the right direction.

"I know that anybody would say a lawman has got to be a damned fool or have salt in his blood to ride alone at night with me," I tell him, "but I've heard that you're plenty salty. How's about it?"

Everybody is lookin' at Bully. He fires a quick glance around, glares back at me. "I'm out to get the Jones killer whoever he is. If you can show him to me, fine. Let's go."

Several men are lookin' at me now and I see warnin's in their faces. After we're gone I betcha they'll be talkin' about what a damned fool Gunman turned out to be and money will be bet two-to-one that I come back tied face-down across my saddle with Bully Smith a-leadin' my horse.

I've made some night rides when I expected to feel the shock of a bullet every time my horse set a foot to the ground, and that wasn't pleasant. I've slept in the same blankets with a man when I knew that he'd kill me if given half a chance and we were both dog tired and it was a gamble who could stay awake the longest or sleep the lightest, and that was bad. But I never made a tougher ride than this three miles into the country with Marshal Bully Smith. The moon was bright and we rode stirrup-to-stirrup. When he slowed down I slowed down and when I picked up I told him to pick up. He allows that I'm a damned suspicious fool, but he kicks his horse abreast of mine.

When we're comin' close to Muskogee May's dive, I rein in. "It's just a little ways up yonder. I've got an idea that Pawnee Ike is the Jones murderer. We're a-headin' for his hangout. I've likewise got an idea that Jake Lawrence figures I'll be here sooner or later and has set a trap for me. We may run onto him or some of his men before we get there."

"What's that?" barks Smith. "Are you leadin' *me* into a trap in the hopes of savin' your own hide?"

"Yes," I tell him plain. "If you'll hold your head up and throw out your chest so that the moon flashes on your badge, maybe we won't get bushwhacked."

This man *is* a coward. His chin goes up and he wipes a sleeve across his badge!

"From here we hoof it," I go on. "Shuck your leggin's and spurs so's not to make any more noise than you can help."

While we're doin' this and tyin' our horses, not for one split second do I let him see my back.

Muskogee May's joint sets in a little clearin' with timber all around. The road winds through the trees and at every turn I'm expectin' to stop lead, though I am hopin' that if Jake or any of his men do spot us and recognize Smith, sight of the law will scare them off. Pretty soon we're at the edge of the clearin'. Haven't seen or heard a suspicious thing and I'm a-wonderin' whether I wasn't too smart for my britches when I figured all this out. Be a hell of a note. May's speak-easy is a double log house with a dog-trot between, galleries in front and lean-to's behind, and it's a right smart layout with stables and such.

"From here," I tell Smith, "we walk straight up and fast to the front porch on the far end. That's where they do their eatin' and drinkin'. We can see everything through cracks between the logs alongside

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the nearest front window if they ain't been chinked."

"Huh! You been peekin' in there?"

"Yeah. Seen a crooked Deputy gettin' his cut from a whiskey peddler."

When we're half way to the house, somewhere behind us a whippoorwill cuts loose. It don't mean nothin' to Smith, but the skin on my back crawls and hair on my neck stands up straight. That bird don't talk his own language proper! On the far side of the clearin' beyond the house another one answers, and he don't sound right to ears that were trained by the Osages.

I mutter soft to Bully, "Line out! Maybe we can beat a pair of bullets to the house. Don't make so damned much racket! You sound worse than a *ladino* in the brush."

BY THE time we get to the gallery Smith is a-breathin' hard and wipin' sweat from his face. He takes one side of the window, I the other. Everything is wide open and we can hear good. Settin' at a table in there, a-talkin' sociable to Muskogee May, is Jake Lawrence! Evidently those whippoorwills told him somethin', for he has twisted his chair so that he's facin' the open door and windows. He's got his six-shooter out, too, a-twirlin' its cylinder and foolin' with it careless like a fella will. Nobody else in there. A door opens cautious in the other half of the house and soft footsteps across the dog trot. I flatten against the wall, motion Smith to do likewise.

Into this room comes Pawnee Ike!

The breed is a wiry devil with a thin, dark face and he moves like a cat. Grins like one, too. He speaks polite, goes and offers his hand to Jake. The big man holsters his gun to shake. Then Pawnee steps back, hooks his thumbs in his belt and laughs quiet.

"Much obliged, Mister Lawrence," he says.

"You're plumb welcome," allows Jake, "but for what?"

"For pinning that Jones killing on Slim Gunman. I——"

"Pawnee!" cries May. "Careful, you fool!"

"Shut up!" snaps the breed. "What's the difference? He won't live to tell anybody anything. I finally got square with Jones, Mister Lawrence, and now I'll get square with *you*.'"

Jake's big face is solid rock again and I can't see a sign of fright in it. "You'll get square with me for what?"

"Did you ever meet a man called 'Injun Willie'?"

"Yes. I shot him in Butte."

"He was my brother, Mister Lawrence, and now I get square for Willie."

"But everybody said it was a fair fight."

The breed shrugs, grins that vicious grin of his. "No doubt, for they say you're not a fair man, Mister Lawrence. But that makes no difference to me. Willie was my brother."

Pawnee moves back another step. Nobody ever wore a meaner face than his'n when he's fixin' to make a kill. I've seen him cut down three men. He torments them like a cat, then cuts them down. Pawnee swears he's the fastest man in the world and maybe he is. So far he ain't never tangled with a faster man. He's got the edge on Jake, I'm afraid. If he finishes Jake he takes a load off'n my mind, though. Or does he? Sweat runs down my legs while I'm huntin' an answer to that question. I rub the palms of my hands on my britches to dry them good—I've got my answer.

One step carries me into the door!

The room explodes. Only one light left burnin'. Gunsmoke blasts the side of my head from close at hand, strangles me. The damned place is chokin' with it. Pawnee breaks in two, slams back against a table, falls. I whirl. Bully Smith is down in the door, a-clawin' at his gun-arm. Jake Lawrence is beside me. His six-shooter is a-smokin' good!

His hard-rock face cracks in many places. He grins a man's grin, and says quiet, "Much obliged, Slim. My boys told me you were comin' and I heard somebody on the porch. This breed would've been a heap too fast for me, but that crooked badge-toter wasn't."

I cough in the smoke, blink my eyes, and ask, "Why did you shoot *him*?"

Jake's face is rock-hard again. "He was fixin' to plug you in the back. I don't believe in that—no more."

"I'll buy, Jake."

"And I'll drink, Slim."

"May, what you got tonight?"

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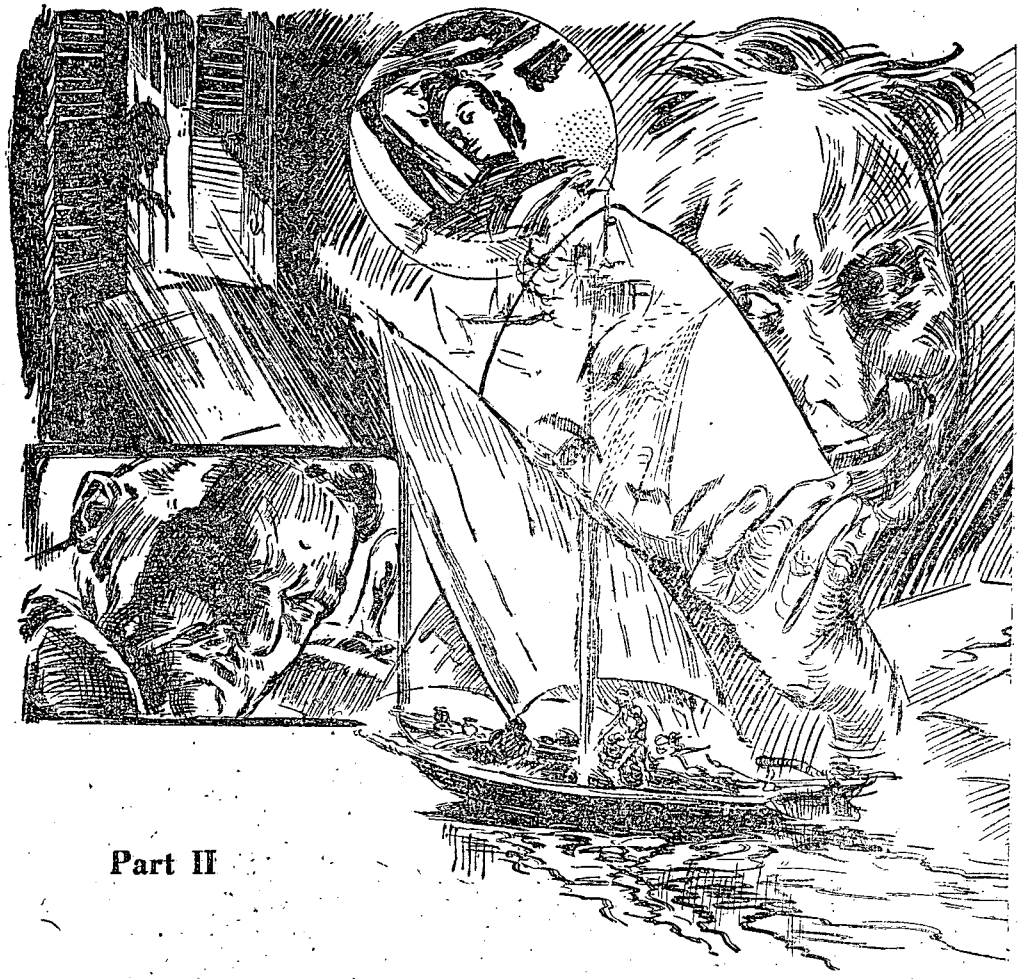

Part II

THE TILTED MOON

By BARRY PEROWNE

THE STORY SO FAR

LESLEY JERRAM, a young English girl has inherited from her father a house on the Spanish island of Ramiros. She determines to visit it and is on her way to Gibraltar when the bus strike in Spain halts her trip. She is given a lift by
JACK MORESBY, who says he is an adventurer trying to reach his yacht the *"So Far"* at Gibraltar. They pick up a Spanish girl who says she must reach the town of Tarifa, and says her name is
ELENA LORCA, but when they also pick up a civil guard
CARVELLO, Elena bribes Moresby to help her escape him, and they abandon Lesley. Lesley finally reaches Gibraltar and meets her father's lawyer,
SIMON BEAUFOY, who advises her against visiting Ramiros and says strange tales have been told of her uncle there,
EDMUND JERRAM, and when she tells him of her adventures in reaching Gibraltar, he tells her that the Gibraltar police are suspicious of Jack Moresby and his partners on the *"So Far."*

Meanwhile Moresby and Elena reach a rendezvous where it turns out that Elena is a member of the underground Spanish

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After All, in the End, What Matters to the Adventurer but Luck?

loyalist party and that her real name is ELENA DE VEDRA. Moresby overhears a conversation about Edmund Jerram, that he has operated—at high profit—an escape center on his island and Moresby thinks he might horn in on this enterprise. He and Elena get out of Spain, Elena to Casa Blanca and Moresby to make his way to Gibraltar. Here he is detected in a double cross of one of his partners, and meets Lesley who warns him that he is on the suspected list of the Gibraltar police. Lesley herself is still determined to go to Ramiros. Through knowing nothing of what Moresby has learned of her uncle, she has been told by Simon that at one time the British Secret Service had been making enquiries about him.

IX

THREE days later, in a clanging, grinding little tramcar, Lesley was approaching the fishing village of Puerto, in Mallorca, on the last lap of her journey to Ramiros.

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It was a Sunday morning. The tramcar was wedged like sardines with girls in black or white frocks, with squares of lace on their heads, and swarthy young men in black cotton suits.

Sharing the small front platform with the driver and some sixteen others, Lesley was hemmed in too tightly to wield her fan, and leaned further over the rail of the platform, grateful for such air as was stirred by the tramcar's velocity.

Pressing close on each side of the narrow, stony track were gardens that swam in heat and color.

Here oranges smouldered from the rich green of their leaves; here clustered the paler ovals of lemons. Here were the warm, flesh tints of apricots, the velvet flush of ripening peaches, the rusty hues of pomegrantes. Here grapes glowed purple in tawny vine-shadow, and muscats big as plums hung in great bunches from groaning pergolas. This was no parched, harsh land like Spain. Jeweled crickets flickered over ground carpeted with the gourds of reddening pumpkins, the cool green of watermelons, the gold of juicy honeydews. Beyond the white-walled, red-tiled houses tremulous in the shimmer over this lush valley rose rounded hills silvery with the foliage of olives.

Beside Lesley, the driver gave his levers a twist. The tramcar lurched, wrenching a howl of good-humored execration from those inside. Lesley was conscious of a growing excitement. She was doing, for all the lip-stretchings and beard-waggings of Simon's senior partner, Mr. Azzopardi, what she had set out to do. She was going to her house at Ramiros. She was almost there. Just ahead lay Puerto, where she purposed to hire some fisherman's boat to put her across to the island, and at Puerto they duly arrived, grinding out from the constriction of walls and gardens to follow the curve of a small, almost landlocked bay. Schooners, fishing-smacks and feluccas lay at anchor on the glassy water. Acacia trees were spaced round the shore. Ahead the houses of the village lifted one flat roof above another, pyramid-like, up the side of a steep hill.

Did she, Lesley wondered, remember all this from childhood? She decided that, since she had to ask herself such a question, then she probably didn't. This place seemed to belong to another world than that which she knew.

The driver reached up to clash a brazen bell above his head. He twirled his levers. The tramcar stopped with an atrocious jerk. In a hubbub of shouts and protests, the crowd battled for the exits. The driver, darkly marking in his passengers an absence of gratitude for hazards outfaced on their behalf, lighted a cigarette-stub and retrieved Lesley's suitcase for her.

"If you seek a hotel," he said pessimistically, "try the Ferrocarril. All are bad, bad."

Lesley didn't want a hotel. She wanted a reliable fisherman. Carrying her suitcases, a trim figure in white frock, red belt, red-and-white sandals, with a 'kerchief tied over her head against the sun, she followed the curve of the cobblestoned wharf. On the wharf reigned a Sunday somnolence. Here and there a black-clad woman knelt on the cobbles, repairing a spread fishing-net. Moored boats nudged the wharf wall peacefully; the water glanced and sparkled.

In the doorway of a small *café*, under an awning marked *Los Tres Hermanos*, dozed upright a short, plump man with an egg-shaped, bald head. He awoke with a start when Lesley sat down at a table under the awning.

"Señorita?"

"Something cold to drink, please," said Lesley, fanning herself. "And perhaps you could recommend some boatman who could take me over to Ramiros?"

"Ramiros? You go to visit Don Edmondo?"

"Yes."

"Then it is Ricardo Costa you want—Captain Costa of the *Sol y Sombra*. He does all commissions for Don Edmondo. You are fortunate, for his schooner is in." He pointed to a vessel lying in the bay. It was larger than the other boats and looked like a felucca re-rigged as a schooner. "He will be coming ashore soon. He eats his lunch at my restaurant."

"I'll wait for him," said Lesley.

The plump man brought her vermouth in a tall glass with a chunk of ice, placed a syphon on the table.

A boy of about twelve came out to inspect the foreigner. He was portly, like his

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father, and wore short white socks, tight black shorts, a white shirt and a bowtie. Unlike his sire, he had hair; it was black and he wore it in an oily fringe, under which his face bulged, button-eyed.

"My boy, Guillermo," said the father, with unaccountable pride.

"*Hola,* Guillermo," said Lesley, always friendly. "Got a monkey, I see."

It was of the same breed as Osmanazar's talented Hassan, at Gibraltar—the Barbary breed—but it lacked Hassan's spirit. It wore a brass-studded collar, and cringed at the end of a chain held by Guillermo.

"What do you call him?" Lesley asked.

"Chombo," said Guillermo.

Bashful, he fetched the monkey a neat, backheeled kick which caught the animal under the jaw and lifted it the length of its chain.

The father winked at Lesley. "Full of fun, Guillermo," he said complacently. "Give him an animal and he will keep himself amused for hours. One should bring up a boy to have resources, no?"

He went back indoors, and Guillermo seated himself on the doorstep.

Lesley, turning her back on the uningratiating child, looked out at the schooner. A dinghy, with two men in it, was putting away from the side. Watching the flash of the oars as they dipped and lifted, she was uncomfortably conscious of Guillermo behind her. He was flicking a whip he carried. It made a viperish sound. She had a suspicion he was tormenting the wretched little monkey with it. She heard the monkey's chain rattle and scrape. She bit her lip.

"*Wheep—wheep!*"

She tried not to look around. The whip sounds went on. She wriggled in her chair. She clenched her hands.

"*Wheeeep!*"

The chain clinked. The monkey whimpered suddenly, like a child. It was the last straw. Lesley whirled up furiously from her chair.

"*Stop* it!"

The prodigy's currant eyes peeped up at her under his fringe. Drawing down the corners of his mouth defiantly, he flicked the whip again in a vicious sidewise cut. Chombo leaped into the air and the lash whistled under him.

"See?" said Guillermo. "It's a dancing monkey."

He brought the whip round again in a wristy backhand stroke. Lesley clutched him by his bowtie, yanked him upright.

"You little sadist," she hissed, fetching him a lightning clip, "I'll box your ears till your head hums! Do you hear, you pathological little monster!"

She shook him violently.

In the countenance of the goggling Guillermo appeared a gaping orifice, from which issued a doleful howl swelling in a swift crescendo. Aghast at the volume of sound she had uncorked, Lesley released her victim, who rushed indoors, roaring calamity and clutching a violated cranium.

Chombo, with a nervous flash of teeth and bat of eyes, darted under the table.

Guillermo senior burst into view from the doorway. His aspect was apoplectic. Abuse gushed from him. His forefinger was gesticulant under Lesley's nose. The table-edge checked her retreat. Her hand touched the soda-water syphon. Before she realized what she was doing, she snatched it up and squirted a long stream into Guillermo senior's face.

This provocative act horrified them both. They stared at each other in the shock of it, Guillermo senior with streaming face and open mouth.

Lesley gasped. She put down the syphon hastily, turned to run, and bumped into a man in a crumpled white suit and a peaked yachting-cap. He caught her by the wrist.

"*Que hay?*" he said mildly.

Guillermo senior explained with impassioned volubility, mopping at his face with the ends of his bowtie.

"It is unendurable, Captain Costa," he raged. "She comes in here asking after a passage to Ramiros. I refer her to you. I turn my back for one instant, and like a virago she springs on my unhappy boy. It is a barbarity! I do not strike my own child. Who is this foreigner, that she lays on hands? I will not support it. I insist on calling the *rurales.*"

"*Momentito,*" said Captain Costa soothingly. He turned ironic eyes on Lesley. He was a stockily built man, whose upper teeth projected slightly under the eaves of a ragged black mustache, giving him a look of sly humor. "What do you say, mees?"

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he asked. "You had, perhaps, a little touch of the sun, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind," said Lesley indignantly. "I'm sorry I squirted the syphon at him, but he should have given me a chance to explain. His abysmal boy was maltreating the monkey. He—"

"Chombo, is it?" shouted Guillermo. "It's the boy's property. He can do as he likes with it."

"You should be ashamed of yourself," said Lesley angrily. "Encouraging him! You oughtn't to be allowed to keep it. It's all your fault."

"My fault!" Guillermo senior frenziedly rejected a defamation of character.

"Tranquil, tranquil, my friend," said Captain Costa. "If the lady is so concerned for the animal's well-being, doubtless she will relieve you of it at a fair price."

The man of principle stroked his chin ruminatively. "It is, of course, a valuable monkey," he mentioned.

"On the other hand," said Captain Costa, with a friendly glance at Lesley, "it has fleas."

"Nevertheless," pointed out Guillermo senior, "it is of a rare strain."

"Yes it is not so young as it once was," countered the captain.

"What a loss, though, for my boy Guillermo!" pleaded the fond father. "Playmates—"

"Think, however," urged the captain, "how much precious time he squanders on his pranks with it."

"There is some truth in what you say," conceded Guillermo senior. "He is, in general, insufficiently diligent." He came to an abrupt decision, squared his shoulders. "Fifty pesetas and no hard feelings!"

The captain looked at Lesley.

Lesley didn't want Chombo; she had no use whatever for him. On the other hand, the thought of leaving the browbeaten little creature in Guillermo's hands was hateful to her.

She opened her handbag.

"Plus five pesetas," said Guillermo senior hastily, "for the chain and collar."

Lesley paid.

"Now," said Captain Costa jovially, "I understand you wish to see me. If you haven't yet lunched, perhaps you will join me?"

"It will be ready in one moment," fawned Guillermo senior, wringing his hands in a spasm of hospitality. "Please, be seated."

The captain was an accommodating man. "No need to discuss money, mees," he assured Lesley, when she put forward her request for a passage. "I have long carried out your uncle's commissions. I go to Ramiros at regular intervals. It is I who collects his mail for him from the *correos* at Soller. I have stores aboard for him at this moment. I was going over tomorrow or the next day, in any case. It is no inconvenience for me to sail today. We will leave right after lunch. Happy to oblige—happy to oblige—"

ABOARD the *Sol y Sombra,* Lesley sat in a deck-chair he produced for her, holding her fan in one hand, Chombo's chain in the other. The monkey was saffron-colored, with a wrinkled, black face. It blinked up at her with melancholy, pale eyes, scratching its chest with a horny forefinger.

The deck throbbed to the deep pulse of what seemed to Lesley, for the type of craft, an unusually powerful Diesel engine.

Watching the shore recede, she thought of how often, in the past, her parents, crossing in some such vessel as this to their beloved Ramiros, must have looked back on this scene.

She asked Costa if her parents ever had travelled in the *Sol y Sombra.*

Standing at the wheel, in his rumpled white suit and his yachting-cap, his knees slightly bent, his shoulders rounded, he shook his head.

"Twelve, thirteen years ago? That is a long time, mees." He projected his teeth at her under his ragged mustache. "I see many people. Regularly I visit all the islands. I carry passengers, cargo. There is little enough these days—olives, olive oil, wine, basketwork." He lighted a stub of cigar, let the spokes of the wheel spin under his hand. "Don Edmondo is expecting you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," Lesley said; "he knows I'm coming."

"So nice for him," said Captain Costa.

He called an order, and a man came aft. He was the ugliest man Lesley had ever seen in her life. His long, sinewy arms reached almost to his knees. His skin was

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the color of pewter. He had a broad, flat nose, wide-nostriled, a gargoyle mouth, and little bloodshot eyes. He wore a Moor's white head-dress, which flickered behind him in the breeze.

Watching the two men as they talked together in Arabic, it struck Lesley that there was a familiarity as of cronies between them.

She became aware that they were now out of sight of land. The dingy vessel was pitching a little, feeling the lift of the open sea. The two men made an unedifying brace. She felt a vague disquiet.

The Moor went forward, his great feet slapping the deck. Costa looked with his sly, soothing smile at Lesley. "How do you like my bosun?" he asked.

"Frankly," said Lesley, "he's no beauty, is he?"

Costa laughed. "He is a Tangier Moor, a denizen of the Rue du Sôk. My crew are all from Tangier. They have the advantage, these Tangier Moors, of knowing a little English, a little Spanish, a little French, a little Italian, as well as their dialect of Arabic. But Mallam Juzeed, poor fellow, his face will be never his fortune. Yet his father-in-law, Yamoun Mohammed, he is an artist well-known to all tourists who visit Tangier. He sells pictures, painted on parchment, of the mosques and minarets, the native quarter—fine, architectural drawings. He is a man of royal bearing, with a long white beard." He chuckled. "Juzeed is an affront to the old man's eyes!"

Night came, the air warm and soft. Wrapped in a woolly white coat, Lesley settled herself comfortably in her deck-chair.

Chombo, whose collar and chain she had thrown overboard, seemed well content to stay in her vicinity.

The sky was spangled with brilliant stars. The moon rose, in its first quarter, still tilted on its back. Looking up at it, she thought, "Where have I heard that that's supposed to be a bad omen?" She laughed softly to herself. She wasn't superstitious. Probably that kind of moon was just a sign of bad weather some time or other.

"The last lap," she thought, and, her hands in her pockets, she snuggled her chin down comfortably into the collar of her coat.

X

THERE was a caressing warmth on her cheek. She felt rather than heard the deep, slow throb of an engine. The *Sol y Sombra* was again under power. Her blue eyes opened to a dazzle of sunshine. Captain Costa, bent-kneed, in his rumpled, white suit, was at the wheel. His receding chin was stubbled; a cigar-stub drooped between his projecting teeth.

Lesley sat up, patting a yawn, and gazed in wonder and delight at the scene before her.

The *Sol y Sombra* parted water as smooth and subtly tinted as pearl shell, enclosed in a shallow concavity of steep hillsides. Along a strip of sand, wavelets unscrolled with a glassy glitter. A sailing-dinghy with the mast stepped was drawn up on the beach, from which the hillside rose precipitously, with olive and fig trees. High above the water, and half hidden in foliage, were the warm-hued walls, the mellow, curved tiles and bleached blue shutters of an old Mallorquin house. All was etched sharply, leaf and tree, shore and dwelling, in the clarity and purity of the Mediterranean morning.

"I *do* know it!" she exclaimed. "I *do* remember it!"

Captain Costa gave her a bloodshot but amiable glance. "Ah-ha, mees," he said, "*buenos dias*. Ramiros, eh? Very snug. Very private. Yes, that's your uncle's house."

Lesley pulled off her 'kerchief, jumped up to remove her coat, straighten her frock, make hasty use of comb and lipstick. In her eyes, looking back at her from the mirror of her compact, were excitement, surmise, a hint of apprehension. She refused to admit the apprehension. The house was hers. Edmund Jerram was only what Mr. Azzopardi had called "the man in possession." It was her house, and she was here, ready to meet fair words with fair words, or *vice versa,* and to do as she was done by.

The *Sol y Sombra* rounded to fifty yards from the beach. The throb of the engine ceased. The anchor went down. So silken was the sea here, so sheened over with tints of rose and jade and palest gold, that Lesley yearned to strip, plunge over the side, and shed the grime of travel in a voluptuous swim ashore. But this wouldn't have

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answered, with Captain Costa projecting his teeth at her as he abandoned the wheel, and Juzeed flapping his aft, looking more hideous than ever in this scene of enchanted beauty.

Ashore, nothing stirred. No lightest air troubled the leaves, or bird took wing, or morning smoke spiralled to the sky from the chimney of the house that was hers.

"He can't have gone away, captain?" she asked.

The idea seemed to startle Costa. He looked up with narrowed eyes at the house, then smiled reassuringly.

"Ah, no, mees, how could he? His boat's there. No, no. He probably heard our anchor. He may come down through the groves to meet us."

No figure detached itself from the shade of the trees along the back of the beach as Juzeed, great muscles writhing under his pewter hide, rowed the dinghy ashore.

With the monkey exploring ahead, Lesley and Costa crossed the sand to a flight of steps that went up under the trees. The steps were of stone, worn and irregular, dappled by the shadow of the arching foliage. It was growing hot. The scent of oranges was pungent. Lesley glanced round at Juzeed, draped about with suitcases, sacks, parcels and boxes. He made a gargoyle mouth at her.

Off to the left, Chombo was celebrating freedom with suicidal plunges from branch to branch, recuperating his energies by occasional brown studies over his fingernails after a good scratch-up.

"Listen," said Lesley, pausing.

Costa wheezed, beside her. All around them was shine and shadow. Her own heart labored. She listened, her breath held, and after a moment heard again, faintly, a strain of music.

Costa grinned. "That's him. That's his phonograph. He's always playing."

The music grew more distinct as they went on up the steps. It was Wagnerian music, sombre and incongruous in the radiant morning.

As the tree-tunnelled steps led them out abruptly on to a patio, the music ceased. Twisted vines arched the patio; leaf shadow patterned the worn flagstones; grapes hung purple overhead. It was breathlessly hot here.

There was a drowsy hum of insects. From the depths of a well with an arch of wrought iron, a falling pebble struck a faint, gong-like note. Behind the well-head, a massive door with iron hinges stood open, admitting a slant of sunshine over a flagstoned floor. Lesley glimpsed, within, a rush-seated, tall-backed chair and an old wall-clock with a swinging pendulum. The clock whirred, and chimed sweetly once.

From the left, along the terrace, a voice said resonantly, "Hark, hark, the dogs do bark, beggars are coming to town—D'you hear me, Costa?" the voice roared suddenly, in Spanish. "Show yourself, you oily blackguard! I can smell you from here!"

Costa gave Lesley a deprecating smile. Padding in canvas shoes with cracked red rubber soles, he crossed the terrace to a pair of door-length shutters standing open.

"*Hola,* Don Edmondo," he said, flashing his bald spot in a slight bow.

"Greetings, my buck-toothed pirate," replied the man in the room. "What are you doing here today? I wasn't expecting you. Come to try a little genteel blackmail again? Hope springs eternal, eh, Costa?"

"Sh, sh," said Costa hurriedly. "I've a visitor for you."

"What! Who have you brought here, you—"

Lesley stepped forward quickly. "Hello, Uncle Edmund," she said.

"Ye gods!" said Edmund Jerram.

He reclined on a cane lounge. He was long and thin. He wore white flannels, a white shirt open at the neck. His legs, with red Moorish slippers on his feet, were crossed one above the other on the arm of the lounge. He had a high-bridged nose, and his face was saddle-dark, the skin stretched tightly over prominent cheekbones. His eyes were amber, with a shallow glitter as they stared at Lesley.

The room was cool. The walls were whitewashed, the floor was of red tiles. On a table beside Jerram stood a portable phonograph, littered round with records and books.

Lesley fanned herself with an attempt at equanimity.

"Ye gods!" Jerram said again, softly.

He ran his hands over gray hair brushed back with a small, tight crinkle in it, then heaved a straw-wrapped demijohn from the

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floor. He splashed red wine into a tumbler on the table, still staring at Lesley.

"Costa," he said, "this is a memorable moment. Behold, I have relatives. They come to me over the bounding main, braving even the cockroaches of your execrable tub. Blood, it would seem, is indeed thicker than water." He raised his glass to Lesley. "Welcome to Ramiros, niece."

"Thank you, uncle," said Lesley guardedly.

Jerram drank, shuddered. "A hair," he explained, grimacing, "of the dog that bit me." He rose. He was tall, with square, narrow shoulders held high. "For the prodigal niece," he said, "the fatted calf. While I see about breakfast, you'd probably like a shower, after a night on that floating infestorium of Costa's. Explore at your will; select your own room. From my recollection of your last letter, I imagine you're here to stay?"

"For a while, anyway," said Lesley. "I don't want to inconvenience you—"

"Who am I to be inconvenienced?" he said. "What am I but the just steward of this, your inheritance? Well, well, we'll wash no family linen before Costa. Music! Let us have something appropriate."

He wound the phonograph, changed the record. Out over the still groves floated the strains of *Night and Day*.

"Excuse me, now," said Jerram.

Limping slightly, he walked past them on to the terrace. Lesley heard his voice raised there in Spanish, rallying Juzeed.

Lesley saw Costa watching her.

She frowned. "Is he drunk?"

"He drinks much," said Costa, "but I have never known him what you could call drunk."

Lesley wandered out on to the patio.

"Only you," grieved the music, "beneath the moon and under the sun—"

Why, she wondered, was that supposed to be appropriate to her arrival?

SINEWY grapevines bracketed her view of the bay below. A stain of blue, deepening over the water, had quenched the daybreak opalescence. The *Sol y Sombra* lay there, in plan, diminutive, the masts foreshortened, the decks stumped about by dwarfs.

Turning, she crossed the patio to the doorway with the ponderous door. The pendulum clock ticked quietly on the wall facing her. She stepped into a little *entrada* from which a narrow stone staircase with a wrought-iron balustrade curved upward. Arches, in which hung bead curtains, opened into rooms on either side.

She held aside the curtain of the room on the right. A ladder of sunlight and shadow, from closed shutters, fell across a tiled floor, leapt a refectory table, sprang halfway up an old oak sideboard, set out with Mallorquin earthenware, against the opposite wall. There was a dry smell of dust and spiders.

Her parents seemed very close to her as she stood looking round. Before long, she planned, she would have all this looking as once they had had it.

She glanced into the other room, then went upstairs.

The stairs gave directly into an immense room with an undulant, red-tiled floor. On the left were four square window-apertures in walls three feet thick. The apertures had only shutters, no glass. There was no ceiling to the room. She looked up at beams and rafters, with whorls of cement showing between the tiles. The wall on the right had a door in it, standing open, and two tall window-apertures.

She walked through the doorway on to a wide verandah. All round rose the terraced groves, from which came a chirring of crickets in the sun. This rear verandah and the one big room occupied the whole of the top floor.

Returning to the room, she opened a pair of the shutters. There lay the sea, tilting vacant and shining to the horizon. From under the canopy of grapevines, there came from the patio a clatter of china.

She looked round the room. In one corner stood a huge Spanish bed with a mosquito-curtain looped in a loose knot above it. Round the walls were laden bookcases. The only other articles of furniture were a flat-topped desk, a deep cane chair, a huge globe in a stand, and a clumsy old studio-easel. They stood about like islands in the sea of floor-space.

The globe and easel told her that this must once have been her father's room. She determined that it should be hers. Evidently no one occupied it at the moment. It was so

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quiet that the scutter of a lizard upside down across the whorls of cement overhead sounded loud, and she could hear men's voices murmurous from the patio.

Suddenly, Edmund Jerram's was raised, angry and harsh.

"Get it into your thick head once and for all," he said, "the game's over. It's finished. It was good while it lasted, but it's old stuff now. You had your share, like the rest. If you've lost it in some half-baked gamble of your own, that's your funeral. Disabuse yourself of the notion that you can regard me as a bottomless basket of prefabricated golden eggs. There's nothing more coming from me. I've returned to private life. Keep your ferret teeth and clutching fingers out of it. Understand me?"

"You misconstrue—"

"Well, don't misconstrue what I've just told you. Try to squeeze me, and I'll squeeze you till your eyes ooze together. Is that quite plain, or is there any ambiguity about it?"

Costa mumbled.

"All right," said Jerram. "It's dead, finished, done with, a closed chapter. Now, go and call this niece of mine. She's taking a shower. Tell her breakfast is ready."

"Happy to oblige," fawned Costa.

Lesley drew back from the medieval window aperture. The sun poured through upon her. The sea flashed.

"Mees? Mees?" Faintly, from below, from the back of the house, sounded Costa's voice.

Lesley shrugged. Oh, well, she thought, none of it was any business of hers.

She went downstairs, walked out on to the patio.

"Ah, there you are," said Jerram.

VINE-SHADOW patterned his lean figure and the table at which he sat. He was sousing grapes in a glass of wine. Coffee-pot and cups were on the table, and a loaf of Spanish bread, with butter and honey.

Jerram tossed a grape into his mouth.

"Draw up," he said. "Simple fare but full hearts. What more can we ask in this, our Eden?"

Costa took his leave immediately after breakfast.

"You wish me to bring your mail with Don Edmondo's?" he asked her. "In one week, I come again."

Jerram, fitting a cigarette into a long holder of the same amber hue as his eyes, said, "You're expecting letters, Lesley?"

"Heaps of them," she said.

Jerram accompanied Costa down to the beach.

Left alone, Lesley crossed the patio to the room where she had first seen Jerram. Clearly, it was a room he used a great deal. Despite its present untidiness, it wasn't dusty like the others.

There was a door on the left. It was massive, with a clumsy iron latch and a big keyhole. She tried it, found it locked. She went out on to the patio, looked at the closed shutters of the locked room. There was a broken slat at shoulder-height. She glanced round quickly, then peered through the broken slat. All was dim within.

Wondering about the locked room, she went back through the *entrada* with the ticking wall-clock, found herself in a white-washed corridor. Opening a door on the left, she found a large bathroom, and when she turned on the shower, the water came with a rush, tingling cold on her hand. She fetched her suitcases from the patio where Juzeed had dumped them.

SHOWERED and changed, she came out of the bathroom, stood listening for sounds of domestic activity. All as still. She walked along the corridor, and at its end, on the right, found the kitchen. It was large and cool; though the shutters of the glassless windows stood open, the sun didn't enter directly. On the table were stacked the stores brought by the *Sol y Sombra.* Along one wall ran a tiled charcoal-stove. Dirty dishes stood in the sink. She lifted the lids of the saucepans on the stove. They were in a mess.

Thoughtfully, she went back to the patio. The breakfast table was uncleared. She heard Jerram coming up the steps through the groves. He limped on to the terrace, dropped into a chair.

"Well?" he said. "Been exploring?"

Lesley nodded, fanned herself gently. "I was wondering," she said, "about your domestic arrangements."

He chuckled. "I hand them over to you, now," he said, "with my blessing."

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"You've been looking after yourself?"

"Certainly. My needs are spartan."

"Mr. Azzopardi told me there were some *peon* families here," Lesley said. "Don't you ever get one of the women in to clean up?"

Jerram fitted a cigarette carefully into his holder.

"Azzopardi told you that, did he? He's out of date. There used to be *peon* families here, but the Mallorquin landowner considered there wasn't enough work for them. He shifted them back to Mallorca years ago. Now, he just sends over a team when the olive harvest's due."

Lesley's fan became still. "You mean there's only us on Ramiros?"

"Only us," said Jerram. "I thought you understood that."

AS SHE gazed at him, a shadowy form raced fleetly over the canopy of vines above their heads.

The sudden rustle, the sag of the vines, a rain of grapes to the flagstones, sent a shock to her heart.

Jerram rose so swiftly that his chair fell with a clatter.

He stared up, rigid.

Between the leaves, a small, wrinkled black face, with pale eyes and two cheek-tufts of respectable white hair, peered mournfully down at them.

"Chombo!" Lesley exclaimed.

Jerram wheeled on her. His face was taut with the shock he had received. His eyes were hard as glass.

"Did you bring that creature here?"

"Why, yes. I—"

"I don't like the things," said Jerram venomously. He picked up the fallen chair.

"Some people," he said, in a more natural tone, "are like that, you know. Tastes differ."

"I'm sorry," Lesley said.

"But why?" Sitting down, Jerram lighted his cigarette. "Why should you apologize? You're the owner here. It's your house—yours to do with exactly as you please."

Lesley glanced down between the twisted vines toward the blue bay. A flicker of white marked the *Sol y Sombra,* under sail and already far out.

XI

"SO BEGINS life with uncle," Lesley said.

It was mid-morning. She had been cleaning the big room upstairs, for her own occupation. Now, she looked out on to a sea sun-hazed and vacant.

Chombo blinked at her contentedly. Memories of malevolences inflicted on him at Puerto had quite left that monkey. He lounged on the sill of the window aperture, an ape at ease.

Jerram had gone off somewhere. From this rear verandah of hers, Lesley had seen his tall figure limping, in the shadow flicker, up a steep path through the groves behind the house.

The heat quelled even the crickets. Only the lizard which lived in this room was active. It streaked across the whorls of cement under the tiles and froze suddenly, upside down, for a look at the intruders. It had yellow and black stripes and beady green eyes.

Chombo saw it. He rose on bow legs, elongated an elastic arm, swung into the rafters.

"Let him alone, you big bully," said Lesley. "He was here first."

It was sunset before Jerram reappeared. Lesley was on the patio, setting the table for dinner.

Her uncle lifted his head, sniffing. "Something smells good."

"Dinner," said Lesley, "in half an hour."

She returned to the kitchen. In the light of a hissing pressure-lamp, everything twinkled and shone with cleanliness. She fanned the charcoal stove under a saucepan burbling with spaghetti. A sauce of minced chicken, with tomatoes, onions and olive oil, breathed enticingly from another. The chicken was canned; the rest of it, floured and breadcrumbed, lay on the pastry-board, ready for frying. She looked around at everything with the complacent consciousness of a good day's work done.

When she carried the first course out to the patio, she found that Jerram already had lighted the candles on the dinner-table. He had showered, changed into clean flannels and shirt, and a blue jacket was slung over his high, square shoulders with the sleeves unshot. As she came out, he was pouring

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something from an earthenwar jug into two glasses standing on the parapet of the well. He held out a glass to her.

"Try that," he said.

With his dark, sharp face, his gray hair with the tight ripple in it, he looked distinguished.

"It needs ice, really," he said, as Lesley tried the cocktail. "Otherwise, what do you think? A suspicion more gin?"

Surely, she thought, this was an uncle's olive branch.

"Delicious," she said.

THE moon rose. Framed by the vine stems, the sea below was wrinkled silver. Moth plumes fanned the candle flames. From the groves breathed perfume of orange and pomegranate. Jerram rose from time to time to put records on the phonograph in his room.

When she returned to the patio after washing up, she found him still sitting at the table, a glass and a demijohn beside him. He was rolling poker dice across the white cloth.

"Come and sit down," he said. Carefully he separated three queens from a ten and a knave. "How long are you planning to stay here, Lesley?"

She clicked her fan open and shut.

"My plans are pretty vague," she said guardedly.

"You didn't get my last letter?" he asked.

"What was it about?"

"It was to tell you I was leaving," he said; "that I no longer wanted to buy the house."

"Then I didn't get it," Lesley said.

"That," said Jerram, "is what comes of only being able to send letters when the *Sol y Sombre* puts in."

"Was it because I told you I was coming that you decided to leave?"

He shook his head. "Just a change of plans. You'll be glad to hear I shall be off soon."

"Next time Captain Costa comes?"

Jerram smiled oddly. There was a glint of gold in his teeth, and his eyes, too, were gold in the candleshine.

"*Not* with Costa," he said. "I've made other arrangements." Fitting a cigarette in his holder, he dipped the cigarette in a candle flame. "That's good news, isn't it?" he said. "That you'll be seeing the back of me?"

"How can I say? I hardly know you."

"Come," said Jerram, "has none of my well-wishers regaled you with the biography of a blackguard?" He splashed wine from the demijohn into his glass. "Azzopardi, for example. You called on him, you say? I'm astounded he didn't advise you against coming here."

Lesley said gently, "He did."

"Yet you came," Jerram said, his eyes on her. "You flouted the advice of the learned lawyer. How come?"

"It's a queer story," said Lesley.

"We have all night," said Jerram, taking up his glass. "Moonlight and booze—what more could one ask to loosen the inhibited tongue?"

LESLEY told him, then, of her journey from Cadiz to Gibraltar, and of her impasse there. She omitted only, with design, to mention Elena de Vedra's name.

Jerram laughed. "You preferred to leave Gibraltar, to come here, rather than to be used as a catspaw by this Verano manhunter to make trouble for the adventurers of the yacht *So Far*? Dear me, which of them are you in love with?"

"None," said Lesley emphatically.

"I wonder," said Jerram.

She changed the subject. "The Spanish girl, by the way, said she knew you."

Jerram was suddenly still. "Knew me?"

"Her name," said Lesley, "was Elena de Vedra."

Jerram neither moved nor spoke. She was startled by the tensity of his expression.

She said quickly, "Elena seemed to think there was something ironic in the circumstances of our meeting. She said that, if I asked you, you might tell me what she called 'the cream of the jest.' "

Jerram's eyes remained fixed on her. "Did she get away?"

"Yes. To Casablanca, I understand."

Jerram drank, refilled his glass, stared at it for a moment, then laughed shortly.

" 'The cream of the jest?' " he said. "Yes, Elena would say that!" He looked at Lesley speculatively. "Shall I tell you? Yes, why not? I'm leaving here. I'll be gone from here before you. What does it matter if you know? Nobody's going to find me

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where I'm going. All right, I'll tell you. The joke was, that you helped her to escape. You, my innocent niece! You see, Lesley, I'm a professional in that business. I sell Escape, with a capital letter. I deal with it as a commodity. Here, in the western Mediterranean, I made a modest corner in it."

He leaned back in his chair, laughed up at the vine-leaves, green-sheened in the candle glow. In his mirth was the delight of the egoist in the parading of his own ingenuity.

"It's simple enough, really," he said, sobering. "I merely co-ordinated the activities of many of the smuggling, trading small craft of this sea. There are swarms of them. They ply between the sleepy little sun-smitten ports of Algeria, Tunisia, Italy, Corsica, France. 'The ports of noon,' I call them. Those small craft have always been *contrabandistas* in a small way. Well, I organized them. I saw how they could fulfil a great demand as the war ended."

"The war?"

He nodded. "It had brought into existence a class of people who were on the run. They wanted just one thing—to smuggle themselves, and what portable wealth they had been able to salvage, out of their hiding-places and into Spain, and ultimately, many of them, to South America. I concerned myself only with the first stage. They were holed up, those people, all around the shores of the Mediterranean—collaborators on the run, petty quislings of all nationalities."

"*That* kind of people!" Lesley exclaimed.

"Exactly. People scared of arrest and trial, scared of confiscation of what loot they'd managed to amass and hold on to. Well," said Jerram, "I sold them what they wanted. I sold them escape. I had my agents everywhere. I had my team of petty skippers of the Costa type. I had powerful friends in Spain from whom I purchased 'protection.' Ramiros was my center. I had quite a staff here. I also used it, on occasion, as a staging post. I had some very interesting guests here at times."

HE DRANK, set down his glass.

"The allied secret services winded it, of course," he said. "They sensed a co-ordinating mind at work somewhere, but they never traced it. They never suspected this insignificant island of being the center of the web, the place where the staff work was done. They never had even a passing suspicion of *me*!"

He rattled the poker dice in a lean hand, smiling his twisted smile, relishing his own cleverness.

She felt a cold contempt for him, an impulse to pierce his complacency.

"Are you sure of that?" she said.

"What do you mean?" he said sharply.

Lesley brushed to safety with her fan a purple moth that flapped about the candles.

"Early in 1945," she said, "the Secret Service were making inquiries, through Mr. Azzopardi, about you and your residence here."

He was startled. His narrowed eyes showed it.

Then he tossed the dice across the cloth.

"Bah! A routine vetting of an Englishman living on neutral territory," he said. "If they'd really been on the trail, they'd have taken some action. They didn't. Now, it's all over. I've dissolved my network, wound it up. Up till only a week or two ago, I kept one or two key men of my staff here. I was toying with another scheme. That was why I offered to buy the house. But then I decided not to go on. I'd done very well, and it's a wise man who knows where to stop. I sent away the last of my lieutenants. My sole remaining employe is Costa. I shall be here next time he comes. The time after that, he'll find only yourself at Ramiros. *I* shall be gone."

He picked up the dice again. His eyes were mocking.

"Pages," he said, "from a closed chapter in the autobiography of a blackguard. Yes, it was an odd chance, your aiding the escape of Elena de Vedra. The only time I ever used my organization in reverse—to get someone *out* of Spain, instead of into it—was for her sake. I wouldn't have done it for anyone else; my 'protection' didn't cover that kind of maneuver. But for her it was different. I took the chance." He rolled the dice across the cloth. "Perhaps the real cream of the jest," he said, "is this—she's the only woman I've ever loved!"

He rose abruptly, went into the house. She heard him winding the phonograph.

She would never understand this man, she thought.

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The record he put on was not some ominous communication of Wagner's, but, as though in mockery of himself or her, it was *Goodnight, Sweetheart.*

He played it over and over.

She listened to it from her own room upstairs.

A single candle, on a rush-seated chair, cast its shine upon the big old bed, and threw magnified over rafters and roof-tiles the shadow of her slim figure. Moonlight through the open shutters silvered the far end of the room. Just as she was getting into bed a sound made her look round sharply. Her skin tingled as a wrinkled hand and hirsute arm reached in over the windowsill. Next second, Chombo humped himself in, shapeless as an octopus, and with eerie, silent agility swung up among the rafters.

XII

IN THE morning, Jerram's story was hard to believe. Lesley leaned with her hands on the windowsill, looking out over the sea. It was silken with dove-breast tints, and the trees in the groves were motionless, every leaf distinct in the pure light.

Such beauty seemed an impossible setting for the events Jerram's story had implied. It was hard to associate this place with conspiracy and corruption, with the comings and goings of greedy, craven fugitives, miserable little dishonored men sweating with funk for their hides and anxiety for the moneybags they had filled by bootlicking, by denunciations of fellow-countrymen, by grisly little extortions made in their days of petty power.

"What are you going to do with yourself today?" Jerram asked her as, at breakfast on the patio, he soused grapes in wine.

"Spring-cleaning," said Lesley tersely.

She didn't add that she wanted no trace or memory left in her house of the rats' convention which must once have been foregathered here.

"An admirable occupation," said Jerram, tossing a grape into his mouth. "It'll keep you—"

He broke off suddenly, leaning forward in his chair, a hand to his side.

"What's the matter?" Lesley asked.

He remained quite still for a moment, then straightened up, shook his head. "Nothing," he said. "A touch of indigestion." He grinned. "It's not your cooking, don't worry. I look forward to more such culinary feats from you as last night's."

Again he was absent all day in the groves above the house.

That night, at dinner, he asked her what was her ambition, what she proposed to do with her life. When she said that she wanted to write for the theatre, he laughed.

"Like your father, eh? Poor Steve, his plays were deadly dull. The blight of sincerity was on them. How well do you know your Shakespeare? Give me some lines."

She quoted at random, from different plays. In each case, Jerram picked up the cue, and continued. It was obvious that he knew most of the plays, with all their parts, by heart. The sardonic note left his voice. He spoke the lines with such feeling for their poetry that, here in starshine and candlelight, excitement kindled in Lesley, she forgot the distant manner she had cultivated toward him.

"Your memory's prodigious," she said.

"I was always a good study," said Edmund Jerram complacently. Amusement gleamed in his eyes. "My stage days are another closed chapter. Most of my acting was done in New York. I was good, you know. Ye gods, how good I was!"

"Why did you give it up?" Lesley asked.

His mouth hardened. "I went dumb."

"Dumb?"

"I once, in an early chapter of an amoral career," said Jerram, "fought in the forces of a South American rebel. I got a bullet through the throat. The wound healed. I thought no more of it."

He reached back for the demijohn on the well-head, splashed wine into his glass.

"Years later," he went on, "when I was beginning to make a new career for myself, I was in a play in New York. My part was long and exacting. I had played it for three hundred and twenty-six performances. In the second act of the three hundred and twenty-seventh, my voice left me."

Lesley's fan was still.

Jerram laughed harshly. "It proved to be that old bullet. The specialist told me it had damaged the vocal cord. He told me my voice would return but that I must never

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again subject it to the strain of a long part." He shrugged. "It was a step on the path that led me ultimately to Ramiros."

Lesley was moved in spite of herself. She felt a sympathy for him. It wasn't until later, when she came to think the affecting tale over, that she realized a curious thing—nowhere on Jerram's leathery neck was there a sign of a small scar even, let alone such a scar as a bullet would have made.

Thereafter she found it difficult to judge whether his reminiscences of villainy and misfortune were inspired by a love of self-dramatization, by some amusement he found in mocking her, or by the fact that he was just by nature an enormous liar. He remained an enigma to her.

ONE afternoon, looking for flowers to embellish rooms now spotless and shining, she wandered up the path at the back of the house. It was very hot. The light was tawny under the olives. Crickets whirred before her over the dust of the path.

She came to a crumbling stone wall. Remembering the map Mr. Azzopardi had shown her, she realized that this must be the boundary of her property. She stepped through a gap in the wall.

Beyond, the olives were more steeply terraced. Every few yards, she had to climb a low, stone-built bank to the next level. Now and then, Chombo appeared, looking down at her from a tree-branch. The olives were ancient, their trunks warped and twisted and hollowed. They petered out presently. This was the summit of the island. The sun dazzled over outcrops of rocks. Among scattered boulders grew clumps of prickly pear and bayonet cactus.

Lesley climbed to a ruinous tower, a Moorish watch-tower, which crowned the summit.

On all sides the sea stretched shining and empty to the horizon. She caught her breath, in wonder, at the beauty, diminutiveness and solitude of Ramiros.

Below, in the direction from which she had come, she could see the roof of her house, bowered among trees above the little bay. On the other side, she could see the red-tiled roofs of three other houses, much smaller, clustered together.

She followed a path which led down to them. They proved to be cottages in a state of decay, with crumbling *adobe* walls, clustered together around an old pump.

She glanced into one of them. It had a flagstoned floor, an arched, smoked-blackened fireplace, a short flight of steps with an iron rail curving up to the doorway of what, she guessed, was the sole bedroom. The hot hush of mid-afternoon quelled the place and held it silent. Only a large, spidery insect, scuttling across the floor, stopped suddenly dead.

Puzzled to identify it, Lesley stooped, poked at it with her fan. The creature lashed its tail over its head with a speed, animosity and power that sent a chill through her.

It was a scorpion.

She ducked out into the sunshine with a gooseflesh feeling.

Edmund Jerram was standing there, his shoulders held high, a thick walking-stick in his hand.

"Exploring?" he said.

"Oh, hello," said Lesley. "I was looking round for some flowers, really."

Jerram's attitude was tense. His eyes, narrowed, with a yellow glitter in the sun, probed her.

"There's a scorpion in there," Lesley said, with a shudder.

"These cottages are gnashing with scorpions," said Jerram. "You want to be careful how you wander about up here. Better stay near home." His tension relaxed. He grinned. "Still beautifying your house? All right, I'll show you where to find some flowers."

As she walked at his side, Lesley noticed a hammer and cold chisel protruding from the right-hand pocket of his white flannels, weighing the pocket down.

SHE was wondering about that next afternoon, as she sat in the dining-room biting her pen over a letter to Simon Beaufoy, when she was startled to see a tall figure standing motionless outside.

It was unusual for Jerram to return to the house in the middle of the afternoon. Yet it was he. He must have entered the house without sound. He was watching her.

Suddenly he swept the curtain aside, stepped into the room.

"Ah," he said. "Busy?"

"I was writing."

"So I see. Been at it long?"

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She was puzzled by his manner. "An hour or so," she said, and glanced at her wrist-watch. "You're back early today, aren't you?"

"I need a drink," Jerram said.

He turned and left her.

He was silent at dinner that night. Several times she sensed his amber, shallow eyes on her.

As she left him to go to her room, he said suddenly, "By the way, Lesley—"

She turned in the doorway. "Yes?"

Jerram sat at the table, cigarette-holder between his gold-flecked teeth, his right hand rattling the poker dice.

"A nod is as good as a wink," he said.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Lesley said coldly.

Jerram rolled the dice across the white cloth. "I'd hate," he said, "to have occasion to regret the impulse which led me to make certain confidences to you the other night. Understand?"

"Frankly, no."

"It's occurred to me that perhaps I was premature in so freely opening my heart to you about the escape business. I did it, I suppose, because of what Elena de Vedra said to you about 'the cream of the jest.' But my confidences were perhaps a mistake. You've made no comment. You've walked about with an air of inscrutability. Your manner has been distant."

"Did you think," Lesley said, "that such a story would fill me with rapturous admiration?"

Jerram's eyes glittered in the candlelight. "I've been thinking about that," he said. "You were—in the Navy, I understand? They pumped you full of notions about duty, honor, patriotism? I suspect there's something of the prig about you, as there was about my brother Stephen. Perhaps you're planning to run one day to the secret service people with a pretty story about me. All right. So do. I shall be gone before that happens. But just while we're here together, a word of advice. Keep your pretty nose out of my business!"

"Anything else?" Lesley said. She was shaking with anger.

"That's all," said Jerram. "Just don't try spying on me. It's dangerous."

She turned and left him.

As she reached her room, the phonograph started below. The sound reached like a taunt—*Goodnight, Sweetheart.*

She lay awake long after the music had fallen silent. In the groves at the back of the house, a nightingale began to sing. Its note was now shyly and caressingly rippling, now finer drawn than fine-spun silver, now pealing in ecstatic fulfillment from the leafy fastness.

She fell asleep, at last, listening to the nightingale.

SHE woke to silence, moonlight, and a sense of tension. She was conscious of the slow, heavy thump of her heart. Her mouth was dry. She listened intently for any sound from below, from the patio.

No sound came.

She raised herself on an elbow. The head of the bed was against the wall on the side of the windows above the patio. All the shutters were hooked back. Though the door to the verandah at the back was closed, the window-shutters stood open. At the window farthest from her bed stood a shadow.

It stood there for a moment quite still, then faded soundlessly from view, as her breath caught in her throat and cold fled down her spine.

Small waves rustled on the beach below the groves. A whisper of light airs roved through the trees. It was an effort for her to swallow, so intently was she listening. Why was Jerram prowling? Was it to assure himself that she was in her room, not spying on him?

The trees whispered secretively, out in a night grown black as the half-moon set. Little by litttle, her breathing deepened and unknowing she sank into sleep.

When she opened the door to the verandah next morning, stepped out into the clean, sweet, early air, she found Chombo lying on the tiled floor. The monkey was dead.

XIII

THIS was one of the most beautiful of all mornings at Ramiros. A stillness of enchantment lay on the groves, and infinity was in the distances of the shining sea levels.

The shadows of the vine leaves were printed motionless on the flagstones of the

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patio, on the well-head, on the white cloth of the breakfast table. The pendant grape clusters were lushly purple.

"Ye gods!" said Jerram. "I almost regret the thought of leaving here." His square, narrow shoulders held high, he stood looking out to sea between the hairy vines. "The trouble is," he added, "a place like this unfits you for the antic transactions of the world at large."

He turned, fitting a cigarette into his long holder.

Lesley, setting the coffee-pot on the table, felt his glance on her. It released her pent-up anger. Her hands clenched. She strove to keep breathlessness from her voice, to speak evenly.

"I don't think you need fear corruption by any tender streak in yourself," she said.

"Is that a compliment," her uncle inquired, "or a reproach?"

"Take it as you like," Lesley said. "Just tell me one thing. Did you kill Chombo merely because you hate monkeys in general? Or was it with some idea of reinforcing the warning you gave me last night? Or was it because, when he saw you at my window, he bit at you, and you grabbed him?"

"What's this?" said Jerram. "Your monkey's dead?"

"For heaven's sake," Lesley said, "don't act. You're not so good at it as you think you are. You know very well he's dead. You killed him."

"Utter nonsense!"

"You were on the verandah outside my room. I *saw* you!"

"Your eyes deceived you."

"Perhaps," said Lesley, "Chombo lying dead up there on the verandah is also an optical illusion."

Jerrum looked at her. His eyes in the sun were yellow as a cat's. Abruptly, he went into the house.

Lesley sat down, poured coffee for herself. Jerram's pretence of ignorance cut no ice with her. She knew him for an actor and a liar. She had been growing just a little afraid of him, but now fury, as always with her, left no room for fear. It was fury that made her hand unsteady as she raised her cup to her lips.

Jerram limped out again on to the patio.

"I've had a look at him," he said. "The monkey wasn't killed. It up and died. If you were really fond of him, though I don't pretend to understand your fancy, I'm sorry."

"Then why kill him?"

"Your imagination is running away with you, Lesley. My hands are innocent of Chombo's blood. A post-mortem would probably show that he died of natural causes, disease or old age. His white sidewhiskers suggest that he was in the autumn of a monkey's span. Or, of course, what's still more likely, he may by his curiosity have vexed some scorpion sulking among the rafters of your room, and have met a meddler's nemesis. Again—"

Lesley couldn't endure another moment of the mordant mockery. She pushed back her chair sharply, rising.

"No breakfast?" said Jerram. Long legs outthrust, he sprawled lazily in his chair. "Well, well, it shows a delicate sensibility. Ignoring your unjust accusations, I'll make a generous gesture. I'll perform the obsequies for you."

She didn't answer. Between the vines, she had caught, far out in the morning blue, a white flash of sails.

"No takers?" said Jerram. "You prefer to bury your own—"

He broke off, following her gaze. Rising to stand beside her, he shaded his eyes with his hand.

"Ah-hah," he said, "the *Sol y Sombra*, already hull up—our buck-toothed friend, Ricardo Costa, punctual to the day."

Lesley felt a deep sense of relief. A moment before, it had seemed to her impossible to support another hour of her uncle's company, his spying, his sneers, his

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lies, his megalomania. Now, there was no need. She made up her mind on the spot.

"I shall leave with him," she said.

Jerram looked at her sharply. "Rather sudden, isn't it? What are your plans?"

"You told me you were leaving soon," Lesley said. "All right, tell me when. I'll stay over at Puerto till you've gone, then perhaps I'll come back, perhaps not. I've seen everything, innventoried everything, cleaned everything. It's all in good shape. I can decide at leisure, in Puerto, whether I'll keep the house or get Mr. Azzopardi to sell it."

"You could decide that here."

"I don't," said Lesley firmly, "intend to stay here another day with you."

"You dislike me so much?"

"I loathe you."

Jerram was amused. "So extravagant an emotion because of a monkey's decease?"

"That just brought a lot of things to a head," Lesley said. "There's no point in discussing it. I'm going."

"No," said Jerram, "you're staying. Pity, but there it is. I told you too much. I can't have you running around, talking, while I'm still here. Once I'm gone, you can talk to whom you please. But you'll leave *after* me, not before."

She kept a tight hold on herself. "What you've done, you've done," she said. "No information given by me could lead to the capture of your—customers. Not now. It's a closed chapter. You said so yourself. Suppose I promise to say nothing of what I know?"

Jerram shook his head. "There's a risk involved that I'm not prepared to take. What's a promise?"

"Then *you* go with Costa today."

"No. There are good and sufficient reasons why I wouldn't travel on his vessel. Besides, I've made other arrangements. I'm sorry, but Ramiros has just got to be big enough for both of us for a few more days. There's an end of the matter."

Anger shook her. "You can't keep me here against my will!"

"Can't I?" said Jerram with a smile, and his eyes were cat-yellow in the sun.

Lesley restrained an impulse to throw the coffee-pot at him. She turned and went into the house.

She had grown surprisingly fond of Chombo. But for the rage she felt against her uncle, the task of wrapping the monkey's scrawny little body in a sheet, and burying it in the light, sandy soil of the groves behind the house, would have upset her more than it did.

WHEN the job was done, she went up to her own room, packed her two suitcases. Snapping shut the catches, she glanced round the huge, raftered room. It was growing hot from the sun pouring down on the roof. Clinging upside down to a whorl of cement, the lizard watched her with pinpoint green eyes.

"Well, Demijohn," Lesley said, for so she had named her surviving companion, "if he's bluffing, I'll call him!"

Demijohn vanished between the tiles with a derisive tail flick. Picking up her suitcases, Lesley went down to the patio.

Jerram was in his room playing the phonograph, and was still there when Costa came toiling up the steps from the beach.

Lesley had made fresh coffee, opened a new tin of milk, relaid the table with ham, the last remaining, rather stale loaf, wine, glasses. She was cool in a powder-blue frock, and, after the sad little ceremony in the groves, she was mistress of herself.

Costa's greasy curls were a shade more luxuriant over his ears and nape as he removed his yachting-cap to present his glistening brown bald spot to her.

"So nice to see you again, mees!"

His chocolate eyes, in their deep hammocks, glanced at her with sly speculation.

Jerram limped out on to the patio. "The bold Captain Greasepot back again, eh? What have you brought us this time, Costa?"

Costa sank into a chair, mopping his face with his cap. "Ay-ay-ay, those steps," he complained, and taking a packet of letters from his pocket, passed two of them to Lesley, the remainer to Jerram.

"Better look and see if they've been steamed open on the *Sol y Sombra,* Lesley," Jerram said. "You can tell by the dirty thumbmarks."

Costa, uninsultable, gave a smile of sycophantic conciliation.

A wrinkled, elderly Moor came tottering up the steps with the usual sacks and packages containing household supplies. This was the moment for which Lesley had been waiting. As the Moor dumped the packages

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on the patio and turned to go, she said evenly, "I'd like him to take my suitcases aboard, captain. I'm coming back with you."

She was conscious of Jerram watching her over the letter he held. She motioned the Moor to wait. She kept her eyes on Costa.

The captain shifted uncomfortably in his chair. His eyes slid to Jerram.

Lesley said remorselessly, "That all right with you, captain?"

"Happy to oblige at all times," hedged Costa. "Er—Don Edmondo—?"

"She's not going," said Jerram tonelessly.

"So? Well—hence—therefore—" Costa lifted his shoulders apologetically at Lesley. "Too bad," he said, and with a jerk of the thumb signalled the Moor to go.

He went.

"So you're afraid to take me," Lesley said contemptuously, to Costa, "just because *he* says so?"

"Mees, you mortify me," said Costa, taking a slice of ham between finger and thumb. "I am Don Edmondo's man."

"His yes man!"

Lesley saw the utter futility of argument. She bit her lip to check furious words that could in no way have changed the situation, could only have humiliated herself.

In that instant, born of her anger, her craving to outwit and hoodwink the taunting Jerram and the abject Costa, an idea sprang into her mind.

She looked quickly down at her fan, so that no change in her expression might betray her thought.

She couldn't imagine why it hadn't occurred to her before. Her heart beat violently. The dinghy! Jerram's sailing-dinghy, which she had seen drawn up on the beach on the morning of her arrival! Jerram thought he could keep her here against her will, could play with her as a cat with a mouse. He forgot that she had been in the navy, could handle small boats—

Costa was watching her furtively. She shrugged, as though resigned to the situation. Rising, she began to gather up the dishes.

When Costa was taking his leave, he reverted indirectly to the request she had made of him.

"You will not hold this against me?" he mumbled. "It is better to do as Don Edmondo says." He looked at her slyly, scratched his stubble of beard, then glanced out to sea and up at the sky through the grapevines. Abruptly, he forgot her. "I had better get offshore," he said. "I smell weather. We shall have a storm, I think."

Lesley, too, looked anxiously at the sea and sky as the two men started together down the steps to the beach. With the dinghy in her mind, she prayed to herself, "No weather! Please! That would be *too* foul luck!"

It was her plan to slip away in the dinghy under cover of darkness, so that Jerram shouldn't intercept her. During the afternoon, while she was upstairs in her room reading her letters, she became aware that the quality of the sunshine had begun subtly to change. A curious yellowing had come into the light that filled the room. Sitting at the desk which had been her father's, she looked toward the rear windows. A greater stillness than usual seemed to have come upon the groves. Many flies had found their way into the room. She walked to the window. The sunlight was golden as a guinea. The foliage of the olives drooped leaden. Not a cricket sounded.

Suddenly one of the window-shutters banged violently, darkening the room. A gust of cold air swept her papers from the desk. The olives grew sibilant. Their foliage tossed.

Going to a front window, she saw flaws racing over the calm surface of the sea. The *Sol y Sombra* was out of sight. The sunlight darkened further, then was quenched altogether by dun, hurrying clouds. The shutter of the window at which she stood swung out eerily at right angles, then crashed back against the wall.

It was a tussle to get all the shutters closed and secured. When she went downstairs, Jerram was making fast the shutters there. He looked round at her over his shoulder.

"See to the shutters at the back," he said. "When it blows here, it blows."

He grinned at her.

XIV

THE tilted moon was at last fulfilling its ill portent. As the dark came on, the storm increased in fury. By ten o'clock, Lesley was forced to admit to herself that

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her project of escape in the dinghy was out of the question for tonight.

Since the evening meal, the first they had taken in the dining-room instead of on the patio, she had occupied herself in the kitchen putting away the stores brought by the *Sol y Sombra.* It was something to do. Meantime, every brief easing of the wind had seemed to her a promise that the gale was blowing itself out. Each time, she had been disappointed. After every lull, the wind seemed to soar to a new pitch of frenzy.

Never in her life had she felt so alone. The pressure lamp, burning with a harsh white light, seemed to accentuate the chill bareness of the kitchen. There was something depressing to the spirit in the endless, manifold voices of the storm—the whistle of the wind, the lashing of the foliage, the downpour of rain on the roof, an intermittent banging somewhere which she couldn't identify. She kept thinking of Chombo's small grave, rain-whipped, up in the groves. Also, for the first time in weeks, she was cold. Despite the coat she had slipped on over her frock, she shivered.

Carrying a candle which the draughts made gutter and smoke, she headed for her room. Through the bead curtain of the arch to the dining-room, she saw her uncle still sitting at the table, his long cigarette-holder gripped between his teeth. He had the phonograph there. He rolled the poker dice idly as he listened to a Wagner record. Aware of her candle beyond the bead curtain, he looked up.

"Play me a game?" he called.

"No, thanks."

"Sulking, eh?" His smile flashed, gold flecked. "Well, well, perhaps bed's the best place, a night like this. Good night."

"Good night," Lesley said.

The memory of his smile was in her mind as she went up the narrow stairs to her room. It was almost, she thought, hating him, as though he found some peculiar pleasure in the storm. Rain, beating through the shutters of her room, formed pools on the floor.

Bed brought warmth but no sleep to her, only on increased awareness of the noises of the gale. The wind seemed to tear at the roof for minutes together, then abandon it, wailing off dementedly into the dark.

It was difficult to distinguish the surging of the trees from the breaking of waves on the beach below. Lesley listened, trying to identify one sound from the other. She was warm and comfortable here in the dark, but she was growing with every minute wider and wider awake.

She began to wonder whether the dinghy were pulled far enough up the beach to be clear of the waves. The thought that it might be carried away haunted her. It *could* have been pulled up quite a bit further. Even a few yards might make a difference, if things got any worse—

The sound of a particularly heavy wave brought her out from under the mosquito-curtain almost as a reflex. She slid her feet into her sandals, pulled a coat on over her pajamas. The room was pitch-black. She felt her way to the head of the staircase, listened intently. She could hear no sound of music.

She crept down to the *entrada.* No light came from the dining-room. The clock ticked imperturbably. She lifted the latch of the door to the patio and the pressure of the wind thrust the door against her. She slipped out, drew it shut with an effort.

The vines were lashing. She felt under her feet the squashiness of fallen grapes. Along to the right, light shone out through the slats of the shutters of the room which Edmund Jerram kept locked.

The sense of space and wildness in the night was bewildering as she flitted across the patio to the steps leading down to the beach.

FLEETINGLY, at times, that treacherous moon showed, ringing with a nimbus, through scudding banks of cloud. A lull had come in the rain, but as she descended the steps cautiously the roar of the foliage over her head bludgeoned her.

It was a wearisome, difficult descent. Now and then she paused to get her breath, her hair whipping her cheeks. Below on the beach, the crashing of the waves grew louder. Unexpectedly, there began now to come to her, from the tumult of sound and movement, a feeling akin to exhilaration, an irrational lifting of the spirits.

Below and ahead, through the black, tossing foliage, flashes of white appeared. As she stepped down at last on to the soft

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sand, she saw before her the seething line of foam.

The waves were breaking farther up the beach than she would have thought possible. The broken water surged in over the sand. Spray stung her cheeks. She held back her hair with her hand. The waves could hardly yet have claimed the dinghy, she realized; and relief added to her exhilaration. She wouldn't have had a chance in a million of surviving in this sea, but she'd get her chance when the storm blew itself out. Pulled a few more yards up the beach, the dinghy would be beyond danger.

She started down over the sand, and checked sharply.

Away to her left, there showed in the darkness and uproar the silver ray of a flashlamp. The circle of light shone on the dinghy, with its stepped mast, then sped over the sand, sparkled for an instant on a loop of water driven up the beach to within a few feet of the boat, and went out.

Lesley stood tense, incredulous.

The trees lashed, along the beach behind her. The moon shed its wan light for a moment. She saw Jerram's dark figure. He was thrusting the dinghy toward the water. The backwash caught the boat. Smoothly it slid down into the maelstrom.

Flying clouds blacked out the moon again. The ray of Jerram's flashlamp reappeared. It followed the dinghy, now moving faster, faster. Its mast swayed madly from side to side. The boat turned broadside on. It was caught suddenly and swung aloft, capsizing, in the jaws of a towering wave.

The ray of light snapped out.

Lesley felt the slight tremor of the beach under her feet as the wave crashed.

There was no sound of splintering, but she didn't need that to tell her the dinghy was gone for good. Here was the explanation of the pleasure he had seemed to find in the storm. This morning on the patio, he must have read her like a book. Probably he had divined her dinghy project as soon as she had conceived it. The gale, coming so opportunely for him, must have afforded him a good deal of sardonic amusement.

He was determined that she shouldn't leave Ramiros before him. Now, he'd made sure of it.

It occurred to her suddenly that she had better move. Jerram had shown himself sensitive to the idea that she spied on him. At any moment, making for the steps to the patio, he might bump straight into her. She would hate to have the flash of his torch discover her here.

TURNING, she tramped across the yielding sand to the trees. Along the beach, the torch flashed briefly. She felt her way in among the trees. Standing close against the trunk of an olive, she waited. It would be better to let him go up the steps first, return to his room.

Very close, the torch flashed again. Shining the ray ahead of him up the steps, Jerram began to mount.

The waves broke with stunning violence. The foliage thrashed. She could feel the distressful straining of the old olive. Growing cold, she drew her coat more closely about her, started up the steps.

The light was still shining out through the shutters of Jerram's room when she reached the patio.

She was breathing quickly from the climb, and now an uneasy thought occurred to her. He had looked into her room last night, to make sure she was there, in her bed. Suppose he had checked up again, now, and found her missing? The thought of his hand clamped suddenly on her arm in the dark made her skin creep.

Under the hissing canopy of vines, she crept toward the lighted shutters. Near the well-head, she paused, watching for some sign that he was in the room, for a shadow moving behind the slats. She saw none. She threw a glance over her shoulder into the dark, then stepped quickly to the shutters.

The light in the room was that of a pressure lamp. Shining out through the shutters, it striped her figure with shadow. She brought her eyes close to the broken slat.

Against the wall facing her stood a clumsy, old-fashioned safe, its door open. Jerram sat at a desk in the center of the room, his back obliquely to the window. A cigarette burned in the long holder jutting at an angle from his mouth. A jacket was slung loosely over his high, hunched shoulders. His gray, crinkled hair gleamed.

Under the pressure lamp on the desk lay a small green baize bundle and a black body-

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belt with flapped pockets. Also on the desk lay hammer, chisels, and a set of silversmith's tools. He was studying something he held in his hands.

Interest held her rigid.

A movement of Jerram's brought his right hand into view. Held in the elongated, delicate jaws of a pair of jeweller's pliers was something that blazed red fire as he turned it critically from side to side, peering at it under the light. The object was a clasp of gold, fashioned in the likeness of a miniature hand, crusted with rubies.

JERRAM flipped back the folds of the green baize on the desk.

Lesley forgot the wild night about her. She forgot the wind that whipped her hair, the seething of the vine leaves, everything but the sight before her.

In the glare of the pressure lamp, there kindled against the green baize such a multi-hued and iridescent sparkle, such a faceted and dazzling radiance, intense and pure, as she never before had seen. It came from a score or more of gems. Jerrum passed a loving hand over them. He spread them on the baize. Lesley could sense his gloating. It was in his very attitude, in the lines of his lean body, as he began to transfer the stones to the pockets of the black body-belt.

This, Lesley realized, must be the form in which he had taken payment from his escapers. No doubt, he had paid his employees in cash. For himself he had reserved something more permanent, more secure, in a world of fluctuating exchanges, blocked currencies. He had kept his profits available and portable.

Now, too, she understood what he had been up to in the groves day after day, why he had carried hammer and chisel on his excursions. He had kept his plunder dispersed in caches about the island—in the walls of those abandoned houses, of that ruined tower, probably in the very stones that formed the terraces of the groves. Thus he had ensured that, at worst, no more than a small part of his loot would be found by an intruder. During this past week or so, he had been leisurely collecting it together, preparatory to departure.

Jerram was clipping shut the pockets of the body-belt. He sat weighing the belt thoughtfully in his hands. Suddenly he dropped the belt on to the desk. He took his cigarette-holder from his mouth. He pressed a hand to his side, as she had seen him do several times these past few days. He bowed forward slowly against the desk, his shoulders hunched.

She watched intently, forgetful of time and the storm.

Jerram levered himself to his feet, lurched across to a bed against the wall on the left. He sank down on the bed, both hands pressed to his side. She could see the glisten of sweat on his dark, narrow face. He was staring straight before him with a look as of remote, anxious calculation. His hands caressed his side. Then his lips drew back from his teeth as though some unseen assailant had slid a knife between his ribs. He stared before him with a kind of blind horror. A grimace as of laughter came to his lips.

Lesley saw that he was, in fact, laughing.

She couldn't hear it because of the wind wild in the vines. But the man's whole body shook with an appalling, uncanny mirth. Then he buried his head in his hands.

Lesley drew back from the shutters. The wind clutched at her. On the beach below, the waves volleyed. She opened the door, slipped inside.

XV

"LESLEY! Lesley!"

Scarcely had she climbed into bed than a crash from below brought her tensely upright, listening. Now, she heard Jerram shouting her name. His voice sounded thin and urgent through the boisterous, unrelenting racket of the gale.

"Lesley! *Lesley!*"

She lit the candle on the bedside chair. The flame guttered and spread redly in the rush of air through the shutters. Again she put on her coat, and, carrying the candle, moved across the room to the stairhead.

She heard Jerram muttering below as she descended the stairs. He was standing in the arch to the dining-room, holding aside the bead curtain. Candles in the candelabra guttered in the room behind him. On the floor of the *entrada* lay the pendulum clock, smashed; he must have knocked it from the wall in passing.

Staring at her, a hand pressed to his side,

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he said acridly, "So there you are. You've been long enough."

"What is it?" Lesley asked. "What's the matter?"

"I'm sick, that's what's the matter. Get me a hot-water bag. Don't stand gaping, girl. Get a move on."

She went to the kitchen. She broke charcoal sticks into the stove, fanned them with the plaited-leaf stove fan to a glow under the kettle. There was no hot-water bag in the house. She filled an earthenware wine bottle, wrapped it in a towel, carried it to Jerram in the dining-room.

He was sitting at the refectory table, on which stood the portable phonograph and a pile of records. He fitted a cigarette into his holder. His hand shook as he lighted the cigarette at a candle flame.

"This is the best I could do," Lesley said.

He took the bottle, pressed it to his side.

"A pretty spectacle for you," he said. "Why aren't you laughing? You came prating to me about the cream of the pest. Well, this is it. Take your cue. Laugh—as I do!"

But it wasn't laughter that twisted his lips; it was a spasm of pain. Sweat started anew on his forehead as he leaned forward, pressing the bottle tight to his side.

"What is it?" Lesley said. "Do you know?"

"What the hell," said Jerram, "does it look like? It's appendix, of course. What I've thought was an occassional stab of indigestion this past week or so is now acting up. It's revealed itself. A dirty, underhand blow from fate—a stab in the back!"

"Appendix?" Lesley said, gazing at him.

"Know anything about it?" he said. "Degrees of rigidity, all that stuff?"

She shook her head. He had dropped his cigarette-holder. She picked it up for him. His eyes held an amber, hectic glitter.

"What pundit was it," he said, "who darkly observed that what you shut out in this life you are yourself shut out from? Ye gods, how true! I've shut out the world from this island. Now, I need doctors. I need them fast. And I'm shut out from them. Your doing, damn you!"

"Mine?"

"You and your plans for using the dinghy! Did you think I didn't know what was in your mind this morning? Of course, I knew. And I took steps." He laughed. "Ye gods, I took steps! When this gale blows out, I could have headed for Puerto in the dinghy, to get medical attention. But no. No, I took steps to queer your little game. I destroyed the dinghy not an hour ago. And within half an hour of doing it, this time-bomb began to tick in my side! It's not your game I've queered. It's my own. There's a sweet irony for you. There's the cream of the jest, if you like. Why in heaven's name did you ever come here?"

Looking at him, at the bravado he was pumping up, she felt a wry compassion for him.

She said, "What about the arrangements you told me you've made for leaving? Someone's to come and take you off, I imagine. When will they be here?"

"Practical, aren't you?" Jerram said. "They're not due for five days yet. And Costa won't be back for another seven. No, my dear, I'm caught. There's nothing for me to do but sit here and await with becoming dignity the detonation of my appendix."

"People whose appendixes act up," said Lesley, "don't necessarily die of it. An appendix can be uncomfortable without necessarily being acute."

"Do you really know the first thing about it?" Jerram asked.

"Not really," Lesley admitted.

"Then for heaven's sake," said Jerram, "spare me your bedside optimism, and go make some coffee."

The night was now far advanced.

WHEN she returned with the coffee, she saw that the candles on the table were no longer guttering. The shadows in the room were still. The wind shook the shutters no more. The stillness was so sudden that it was bewildering. As quickly as it had arisen, the wind had dropped. The sound of the sea was as an intermittent drum-roll in the quiet.

"Yes," Jerram said, reading her thought. "It's over. In another hour or two, I could have launched the dinghy. There's a priceless thought! I'm not a lucky man. I was never a lucky man. Brains, audacity, a complete absence of a hampering moral sense—I had everything. Everything but luck. At the very end of every scheme I ever launched

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—right there, right at the winning-post, fate was always lurking like a blasted bravo with a knife for my back! Luck. What else matters but luck? Better to be a village idiot with a lucky streak than a genius with a jinx on him. Hah! The law of compensation—"

It was a kind of brooding obituary that he uttered, leaning back in the big Mallorquin chair, his chin on his chest, a cigarette fuming in the holder between his long fingers.

Lesley poured the coffee.

JERRAM looked at her with eyes red-rimmed and bloodshot. He sat up, put the wrapped bottle on the table, felt his side tenderly, exploratively. His teeth bit into his lip.

"Still sore?" Lesley asked, watching him.

"No better, no worse, I judge."

Lesley put plenty of milk into the coffee for him. "Ignorant as I am," she said, "I'd be careful what you eat and drink. Meantime, it might help if you didn't worry too much."

"What charm you have!" said Jerram. "Do I detect the dulcet coo of the ministering angel? I don't think I could stand that!" Suddenly he laughed. "Lesley?"

"Yes?"

"It's just dawned on me," said Jerram. "I know what your Chombo died of. Appendicitis, obviously. That's it, appendicitis!" His laughter pealed, then ceased with a grimace of pain as his hand went to his side.

It was bravado. She knew his fear, sensed the depths of it in him. But he had the courage of the born scoundrel, the man who lived by his wits. He was incorrigibly the kind of man who, whether he died soon or late, would go to his reward with his thumb grafted to his nose.

"You don't laugh," he said. "Why not? You must admit the situation is comic. Just now, I said you were to blame for it. A mere fevered fancy—this is my own doing. You behold in me the lineal descendant of the clueless lumberjack who sat on the lofty branch and diligently sawed it off between himself and the trunk. You may split your sides with my avuncular blessing."

"I haven't that kind of a sense of humor," said Lesley.

"Ah, to hell," said Jerram, with a spirit of anger. "What's it to you whether I live or die? Go on, tell me. Why should you bother to sit here with a long face and drink coffee with me and listen to my talk?"

"Would you rather I left you?"

"No!" He caught her by the wrist. His touch was dry, hot. "Why should you care what happens to me? Tell me, I'm interested. There can't be anything in that old gag about blood being thicker than water?"

She bit her lip. "I don't know."

"Well, then?"

"Well, you're in pain, aren't you?" she said. "I wish I could help you."

He sipped his coffee. His face looked gray; his eyes yellowly reflected the candlelight.

He scoffed at her suddenly, "You're a fool, Lesley. You think I killed that monkey, and it's the one thing you can't forgive me, isn't it? If I were to say to you, 'Say you believe me about Chombo, and I'll make you rich,' you couldn't speak the words, could you? If I were to say, 'I'll fill your lap with jewels,' you still couldn't speak the words. No, not even if I poured gems in a shining cascade into your lap from my two hands! You're a fool—you'll be a fool all the days of your life. My brother Stephen—I say it sitting here in the house that was his—was the same kind of fool. I'll tell you something. It was the one thing I envied him, and it's the one thing I envy you—to be that kind of a fool."

He stared at her broodingly.

"Just phantasy, you think?" he said. "This talk of jewels? Don't be too sure! If I chose, I could make you rich. But I wouldn't. Live or die, I wouldn't give you so much as a five-peseta bangle. I loathe you as I loathed your father!"

His ranting was powerless to move her. She felt only a kind of contemptuous pity for the man.

She glanced beyond the radius of the candleshine, toward the shutters. To her astonishment, not only daylight showed through the shutters, but the warming gold of the sun.

"It's broad day!" she exclaimed.

She made to rise, but Jerram's hand fell again on her wrist in a hard grip. He was looking toward the shutters.

"Listen!" he whispered. "Listen!"

Sh-sh-SH, came the sound of the sea from the beach, more loudly than usual. Just outside, on the patio, a bird talked joyously to

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itself as its flittings shook the night's raindrops from the vine leaves.

"Someone's coming," said Jerram.

Lesley could hear only birdsong and the sea's beat.

"Coming up the steps," said Jerram—"talking. You don't hear them? Listen with your appendix—as I am. The devil looks after his own—after all. Ye gods, what luck, what luck!"

Rising, he went into the *entrada*, and in the arch the strings of the bead curtain swirled and clacked behind him.

Lesley jumped up. Lifting the catch of the shutters, she thrust them wide. Her raised arms opened her coat. Through the canopy of leaves, the sun's warmth netted her slim, pajama-clad figure.

The day was glorified with the sparkle of unwonted moisture. Fallen grapes, dotting the patio, stained the flagstones with a purple juice as of spilled wine.

Rocking on the heave and shine of the uneasy sea, below in the bay a white yacht rode at anchor.

She knew it for the *So Far* even before she heard the voices approaching up the steps through the groves and Jack Moresby and Georges Bouchot stepped on to the patio.

XVI

BOUCHOT looked away, smote himself on the forehead with the heel of his hand, returned to Lesley the stare of his dark, audacious eyes.

"Yes," he muttered. "But yes." He pointed at her suddenly. "Speak," he said.

"Hello," said Lesley.

"She spoke," said Bouchot, awed.

"That settles it," said Moresby, with a grin. "This place isn't Formentera. It's Ramiros."

Lesley drew her coat about her, stepped out on to the patio.

"Certainly it's Ramiros," she said. "Where have you sprung from? Where were you going? How do you come here?"

"Port of departure, Gibraltar," Moresby said. "Course, east-north-east. Destination, Ajaccio. We ought to have passed well to the north of here, but the gale caught us. We hove to, but the drift set us to the south all through the night. We nearly knocked this island out of the sea. I don't know how we managed to claw off."

"Seamanship," said Georges modestly.

"It was in sight again at daybreak," Moresby said. "There was some argument about it. Georges here thought it was Formentera. Hal and I had a hunch it was Ramiros. So, though we'd have preferred to keep well clear of Spanish waters, we thought we'd take a chance, come ashore and find out where we were. I laid a bet with Georges, not only that this was Ramiros, but that the first person we laid eyes on would be you!"

"Faulty charts," said Georges, clutching at excuses for the puncturing of a born mariner's intuition.

"Tell us one thing, Lesley," said Jack Moresby. "Break it to us quick. Are there any carabineros, police, coastguards here?"

"Not a shadow of one," Lesley said. "You're quite safe."

There came over her a feeling of weakness, almost of lightheadedness. It was a reaction to the crazy night. Her hands in the pockets of her coat, she leaned back against the shutters, looked at the two men, and laughed helplessly.

Bouchot raised his brows. Then, glancing at Moresby, he, too, chuckled. "But yes," he said. "It's been a bad night. If you could see the spectacle of yourself, *mon vieux!*"

There was a slit down the right leg of Moresby's gray flannels; dried blood showed on a long cut on his shin. His khaki shirt was ripped across one corner; the handkerchief tied round his neck was sweat-stained. Yet his mahogany-dark face was shaven, his smooth hair gleamed like black enamel in the sun, his mustache was close-clipped.

He set his pipe between his white teeth. "I look less of a beachcomber than you do, anyway," he told Bouchot.

It was true. Scuffed brown shoes flapped on Georges' sockless feet. His battered, mobile face was beard-stubbled, and his voluminous Basque beret slanted over one ear.

"With me," he protested, "it is different. I have license to be picturesque. I am a man of Villefranche."

"I'm sorry I laughed," said Lesley. "You're welcome here. You couldn't *be* more welcome."

"That's good hearing," Moresby said. "It

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was quite a wind. We were bailing till we had blisters up to the elbows. We lost a sail, split clean up the middle before we could get it in. Our radio set—brand-new, too—was smashed to pieces. Our—"

"Your radio was smashed?" It was Jerram's voice. He stepped out from the dining-room on to the patio. He had shaved and changed. His tall figure, in white flannels and shirt, a light tweed jacket slung loosely over his shoulders, his long cigarette-holder held with grace between his fingers, intensified by contrast the disarray of the other three. Only the drawn lines in his face, a gray tinge to his lips, betrayed his continuing pain.

Lesley introduced the newcomers.

"Your radio was smashed?" Jerram said again, as he shook hands with them. "That's a pity. I was hoping to make use of it."

"May I ask why?" Moresby asked.

"If it's gone, it's gone," said Jerram. "I should be lacking in hospitality if I paraded my own quandary before we've had breakfast. Lesley, our visitors are probably in dire need of refreshment."

"Yes, I'll see to it," Lesley said. "Where's Hal?" she asked the others.

"I'll call him," said Georges, and putting his fingers between his teeth, stepped to the gap in the vines and awoke the echoes with an earsplitting whistle.

Moresby followed Lesley into the house.

"I insist on helping with breakfast," he said. "What can I do?"

She set him to fanning the charcoal to a glow while she prepared the percolator.

"Looks as though we're fated to cross each other's trails," Moresby said. "What's all this about a quandary, and wanting to use our defunct radio?"

She glanced at him. In the airy kitchen, now flooded with sunshine, he stood, pipe in mouth, at the tiled stove, wielding the plaited-leaf fan briskly.

"I think I'd better leave my uncle to explain," Lesley said. Setting the percolator on the stove, she asked, "How did you know I was at Ramiros? I don't remember telling you I was coming here."

"Elena de Vedra told me."

"I see," Lesley said thoughtfully. She added, "Did you have any trouble with Verano, after I'd gone?"

Moresby laughed. "None whatever. He hated to see us sail out from under his nose, but there was nothing he could do about it. They're probably on the watch for me as a blown British agent, and the sooner we're off this island, out of these waters, the better I'll like it. But as far as Gibraltar's concerned, the trouble's all blown over there."

LESLEY said no more. Leaving him fanning the stove, she went to shower and dress hurriedly. From her window upstairs, as she was brushing her hair, she heard

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Hal Jessop arrive on the patio. Bouchot was describing to Jerram the yacht's vicissitudes in the storm. It was a dramatic account. She could imagine the animated gestures which accompanied it.

The queer thing was, she couldn't quite believe in it.

Her hairbrush made slower and slower strokes. A thoughtful crease came between her level, dark brows as she listened to the vivacious voice from the patio. Surely it was a very curious chance that brought together three admitted fortune-hunters and a man with a belt full of jewels?

The lizard was watching her.

"I wonder, Demijohn," she murmured. "If Elena told Jack I was coming here, what else mightn't she have told him? Mightn't she have told him about my delightful uncle and his activities? Could she possibly have mentioned that he liked to receive payment, for his services, in the form of—jewels?"

The lizard hung immobile, head cocked, on the sun-warmed wall near the window.

Lesley bit her lip, began to wield her brush more vigorously.

"No," she said. "No, no, no! Just because they have a bad name is no reason for me to start imagining things."

Yet, as she went downstairs, her first soaring relief at the appearance of the companions of the *So Far* was tempered by uneasiness.

Moresby carried the breakfast tray out to the patio. Lesley followed with the coffee. Hal Jessop rose from the well-head where he was sitting. He had evidently shaved and changed before coming up to the house. Tall, loose-limbed, he wore white shorts and shirt. With his olive-brown, regular features, his striking ash-blond hair, his clear gray eyes, he was even better looking than Lesley had remembered.

"The girl with the fan again," he said, smiling.

"An amazing chance, your turning up like this," said Lesley.

She looked at him levelly, and saw the slight flush that came to his face as he agreed.

She kept thinking about that flush as she poured the coffee. Hal was in some way set apart from the other two. Back in Gibraltar, she had sensed that. He was different from them. Was it that he didn't lie so well?

Her suspicion deepened.

Jerram forswore his usual habit of sousing fruit in wine. He ate nothing, only drank coffee and smoked cigarettes. Lesley noticed that as often as his hand went to his side it crept also to his waist, higher up. To her the small, unconscious gesture spoke volumes. As well as his pain, he had now another preoccupation. He was wearing the body-belt under his shirt.

His manner was genial, hospitable. She wondered what was going on in his mind. He knew about these three men. He knew what they were. She had told him about them.

The sun climbed higher. The heat shimmer started over groves and sea.

Jerram passed round his cigarette-case.

"I understand from Lesley here," he said, "that I owe you my thanks, Moresby."

"Your thanks?" Moresby said.

Jerram fitted a cigarette in his holder. "For the aid you gave to a friend of mine, Elena de Vedra."

"Was she a friend of yours?" Moresby exclaimed.

"A very cherished friend," Jerram said. "And now, by this odd chance of your arrival here, I am so placed that I have to ask your aid for myself. An hour or so ago, I was disposed to cry, 'A sail! A sail! My kingdom for a sail!' At the psychological moment—or perhaps, since an appendix is involved, I should say at the physiological moment—your own sail hove in sight."

"Appendix?" said Moresby, frowning.

"Mine, at the moment, is causing me some disquiet," explained Jerram. "Last night I was convinced that it wasn't only active, but liable to detonate at any moment, letting the chips fall where they would. This morning," continued Jerram reflectively, "I have the sensation of judgment suspended. An uneasy state of affairs. I shouldn't like it protracted."

"I should think not!" said Moresby.

"You understand, then," said Jerram, "my eargerness to submit my gizzard to the cutlery of the surgeons. Well, the only boat we had here was lost in the storm last night. I want a passage with you to Puerto right away."

"Puerto!" Bouchot exclaimed.

Both he and Jessop looked at Moresby.

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Moresby's teeth were clamped hard on his pipe. "You think it's really serious?" he said to Jerram.

"I can judge only by degrees of funk," said Jerram frankly. "My funk is enormous. I understand you fellows are—paying your way as you go. I understand you were paid for the service you rendered my friend, Elena de Vedra. I'll pay you, and pay you well, to do this service for me."

"This is the devil of a spot," Moresby said. "Mallorca is the nearest place for you to get medical attention, yes. But it's Spanish. We daren't take you there. It's precisely because of what happened over Elena de Vedra that we can't do this."

Jerram looked at Lesley. "What did I tell you last night? Better to be a village idiot with a lucky streak than a genius with a hoodoo on him." He turned to Moresby. "So, indirectly, even my cherished friend, Elena, may in the end prove the death of me! It's a Jonah who is asking to board your vessel, I'm afraid. But board it I must."

"We'll take you anywhere but to Spanish territory," Moresby said. "It's dangerous for us even here in this out-of-the-way place. Along the Mallorca coast we'd be signalled instantly. We'd be pinched. Heavens knows what'd happen to me—Lesley has some story about a place called Villa Cisneros—but it wouldn't be nice, and the yacht would be confiscated for a certainty. It's all we've got in the world."

"Moresby," Jerram said, "I've a certain amount of influence. I think I could square your trouble with the Spanish. I'll guarantee to do it."

"I'll take your word for that," Moresby said. "But—I don't want to alarm you—but suppose this appendix of yours acts on the way. Suppose you're unconscious when we reach Mallorca. You're hoicked off to hospital. What happens to us?" His face was hard. "We can't do it. It's a risk we just daren't take. Anywhere but Spanish territory, yes."

He walked across to glance down between the vines into the bay.

"There's a fair easterly breeze," he said. "It'd be unfavorable if we were making for Mallorca, but if it holds, it'd give us a quick passage to Gibraltar. We've had our difficulties there, but they're all over now. You'd get first-class attention in the civilian hospital at Gibraltar—better than you'd get anywhere else. The obvious thing to do, Mr. Jerram, is to take you to Gibraltar."

Lesley looked at her uncle.

He tapped ash from the cigarette in his holder. "My luck," he said. "My malicious fortune! Your radio, Moresby—it's beyond repair?"

"Absolutely, I'm afraid."

"Gibraltar is a far longer passage," Jerram muttered.

"Not so much longer," said Moresby, "if this breeze holds."

Jerram sat frowning at his cigarette. Sunshine, spearing the vines, glittered on china and silver. Lesley opened and closed her fan. She was tense. Vivid in her mind was the picture Moresby had drawn of Jerram on the yacht, unconscious, helpless. But her imagination added details to that picture. It added the black body-belt, and a vision of the faces of these three young men, fortune-hunters, adventurers, when in the cramped cabin they found the belt on Jerram and saw its contents.

JERRAM pushed back his chair sharply. He rose.

"Would one of you," he said, "be good enough to get my stuff down to the beach? I'll show you what there is. There's not much."

"Only," said a voice in Lesley's mind, "a beltful of jewels!"

She, too, stood up. "My suitcases," she said, "are already packed."

All four men looked at her.

Jerram said, "Why should you come? Yesterday you wanted me out of the way. You wanted your house to yourself. Well, I'm going. You've got it. Why should *you* come?"

Lesley fanned herself gently.

"Perhaps there's something in that old gag you spoke about," she said. " 'Blood is thicker than water.' "

(*To be concluded in the next* SHORT STORIES)

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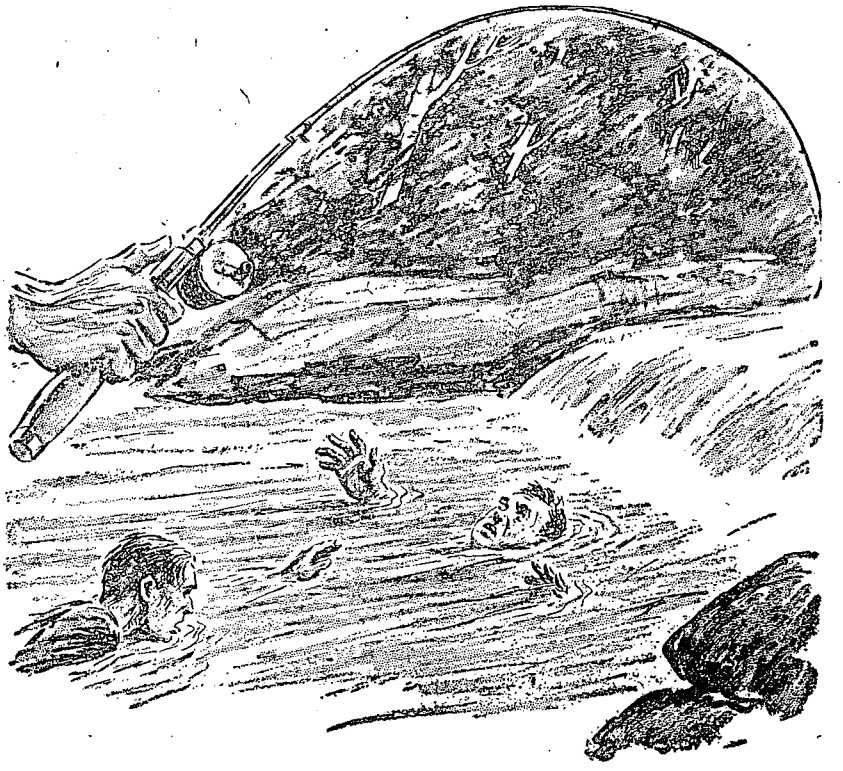
When Those Partners Hooked Anything—Man, Fish or Business Deal—They Went the Limit



DEMONS DON'T MAKE FOOTPRINTS

By ARTHUR H. CARHART

YOU must believe me. I did not murder either P. J. Maxfield, head of the fishing tackle company, nor Lance Deal, his associate. I know how they died. You may not believe part of my testimony, but it can be verified.

My name is Willis Claybourne and I am a skilled mechanic working for the fishing tackle concern that P. J. Maxfield headed before his strange death. It is my job to take the new patterns in tackle and devise the tools for quantity production after test models are completed.

My boss, P. J. Maxfield was a hard man. You must know about him, and the others, to understand what did happen out there in the wilderness. At the club, Maxfield was considered jovial, good-natured and a real sportsman. People believed his success was based on knowledge of fishing and ingenuity in designing new and effective lures and tackle of all types.

Our company put out the Bazz-whiz last year and it was a sensation among new lures. The Bombo-bang plugs were the best sellers the year before. P. J. Maxfield was supposed to have designed them both.

The fact is, that Lance Deal, who had a minor interest in the tackle company, was

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the brains of the outfit. Few people knew him. He was a moody, dark-eyed, thin-faced, nervous man, with big ears. Often he reminded me of a weasel hunting for blood. But he had brains. He knew fishing lore far beyond anything that Maxfield had.

Maxfield was the big, jovial, hand-shaking one of this pair. Lance Deal was the devilish schemer. They had two things in common. Both Maxfield and Deal would steal the basic idea of some other company's lure, and then Deal would improve on it, for he had that ability. He'd dress it up, make it attractive to both fish and buyers, after which Maxfield would out-advertise competitors and cash in on the theft. This pair had no ethics.

The other place they found common ground, was in hoggishness in taking game or fish. Neither was satisfied with a fair day's catch. They both would take all the law allowed, and more. But Maxfield would go at it in his big, bull-headed way, never giving the fish a chance, always using heavy tackle. He generally shot bigger fish with a small caliber pistol instead of playing them in.

On the other hand, Lance Deal seemed to take fiendish delight in matching his wits against a fish. He played them all the way, yes. He watched every move, his dark eyes glittering all the time, but I'm sure he got no real pleasure out of it. It was something of the killer fever that always seemed to run through him when he was toying with anything that had life in it. Perhaps it was this quality that made him such a genius in devising the lures that were so deadly. He always used these with cold, calculating deadliness.

Three or four times each year, Maxfield, Deal and I would go on a fishing trip taking the new, hand-made models of the lures being tested for next season. There are sportsmen that I would rather go with than these two, but when it is business, you go along with whoever signs the payroll if he says you're going.

I WISH now I'd refused to go on this trip. For the past two nights I have had nightmares in which I was trying to pull Maxfield out of the big, slow moving pool below Black Birch rapids, while he tore at his neck and some invisible force, like unseen demons, kept dragging him out of my reach and choking him. Maxfield was a champion swimmer once, and he was helpless. I was helpless. Every time I clutched for him, he was dragged away by this invisible force that was playing him in the water until he died.

That was after we had found Deal's dead body in the pool. I thought first Deal had had a heart attack and fallen into the water; had died naturally. I know now that he was dragged to death just as Maxfield was.

It was murder; nothing short of that.

Last winter, Lance Deal came to me with a new, strange-looking lure, that he had worked up from the design of a competitor, and I will say that it had enough of Deal's skill worked into it so it was far advanced from the thing he copied. Tested at the factory it behaved in the water like a crazed thing. If a fish would not strike from hunger, it would strike from fright and anger.

"It will knock 'em cold," Deal told me.

"Fish or customers?" I asked.

"Both," said Deal, grinning his thin way. "Both fish and fishermen will be suckers for this, Claybourne. I've already talked to Maxfield and we're going to test it in the lake, rapids and river at Black Alder portage at the inlet of Skinflint Lake. Just as soon as we can get there after the ice goes out. I'll go up a couple of days ahead of you two, to give the lure a preliminary run, get some bugs out of it if there are any. Then we'll all have a whack at it when you get there."

It was a strange looking lure, sure enough, and I was turning it over in my hands doing some figuring on the molds we'd have to make to produce it, when Lance Deal made another remark that was not significant at the time but became very much so later.

"I've got something else practically cornered that will revolutionize fishing of all kinds," he said, and I looked up to see the glint in his eyes.

"Just whose invention are you trying to glom onto now?" I asked.

Deal laughed, and it was like tearing charred paper, when he replied, "I won't give you the clue to what it is, but the guy I'm going to corner and wring it out of is Nicholas D'Fanger. You remember that

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nutty individual we had working for us before the war."

I remembered Nicholas D'Fanger all right. He was a strange, moody sort, rather hard to approach and always traveling by himself. But he could do tricks with tackle that were beyond anything I've seen the most publicized experts do. He had an almost magical control of every part of a casting rig.

I got a bit better acquainted with D'Fanger than anyone else in our factory. I found he was full to the gills with research into the supernatural. He was hepped on the ability of mind to control matter. Maybe that was part of his secret in doing such unusual things with rods and lines and plugs. I don't know—that's just an idea, maybe. Some would have considered him plumb nutty. He was kinda screw-ball.

There had been natural antagonism between Deal and D'Fanger. Deal bullied this man in a quiet, merciless way. D'Fanger needed the pay he got or he wouldn't have taken it. No man would. He had some inventions ready to patent when he came to work at our place, and Deal stole them. There was icy hate between these two. I saw D'Fanger pick up a gaff one day and handle it like he'd relish sinking the hook into Deal's throat and tearing the breath out. Deal saw it too, and he smiled, just daring the other fellow. It was bad.

One day D'Fanger dropped out of sight, no trace left. Deal was angry then; tried to find that man, because some lures were in process and D'Fanger walked out in the middle of his work.

DURING the war, I saw D'Fanger at one of the camps. He put on a magic act and did mind reading. He did things beyond anything I've ever seen professionals do. He seemed to have occult powers; unseen helpers. He held a thousand GIs spellbound. Then he walked off the stage sort of contemptuously, as though disgusted that the audience hadn't seen he had drawn on the supernatural to create the illusions. I tried to waylay him after the show, but he had vanished, nobody knew where. There was something uncanny even about that disappearance. I didn't mention this incident after I got back from the Army. No use doing that. I didn't want him back and have to watch the hate smoking and smouldering between Deal and D'Fanger.

I wasn't thinking about D'Fanger when Maxfield and I settled down in the little day coach that carried us to where we hit the water trail to Skinflint Lake. I was looking out of the window just before we left the junction, and I saw a man who somehow reminded me of D'Fanger, but I wasn't sure, because this man wore a beard and he was dressed roughly. He was staring our way, but disappeared without my knowing where he went. I might have said something to Maxfield then, but he began talking about the new lures and how they'd send the wall-eyes wild.

"We'll sure slay 'em!" he said, and I had a picture of him horsing in big wall-eyes, smashing them on the head or shooting them, and then just tossing them aside. I used as many of the fish as I could and gave some to the Indians up the lake, but some always spoiled. It was a stinking deal more ways than one, always.

The sun was still pretty well up when our canoe swung toward our regular camp site near Black Alder rapids. We had a kicker motor on the canoe, because Maxfield wouldn't paddle, so we made good time. We cut off the motor, coasting toward the rock ledge that served as a landing, while Maxfield yelled for Deal. Usually when Deal went ahead of us and had camp pitched, he would be waiting at the landing. But he wasn't there this time and did not answer the shout.

"I'll bet he's at the pool slaughtering those wall-eyes with the new lures," Maxfield said. "That guy goes nuts when he hooks one fast."

I had a picture of what would happen to the wall-eyes that were up in the swift water this time of year. There'd really be a slaughter. I couldn't talk either of these fellows into releasing fish alive when we were testing lures. When they hooked anything, man, fish or business deal, they went the limit.

Everything about camp was in good shape. We expected Deal to show up right away. But he didn't. Maxfield waited for an hour. Then he took his casting outfit and some of the new lures, and hit for the big pool. I didn't care to see the show so I stayed in camp. I heard Maxfield shoot

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a couple of times with his belt gun and knew he'd gotten over anxious in killing a big fish.

A little later he was yelling. He called my name. At first I figured he had hooked a particularly big one and wanted me to see him land it. He was vain about fishing and liked to have an audience. I took my time at first, but he kept yelling, so I trotted finally, to where he was on the bank. His steel rod bent almost double. There was something on the end of his line that looked like a short, heavy sawlog when I got a first glimpse.

I never saw Maxfield's face look like it did at that moment. It was slick with sweat and his cheeks were white like unbaked pie crust. He could hardly talk, and I couldn't guess for a moment, whether it was from exertion playing what he had on his line or something else. It was something else.

"Deal!" he finally whispered. "Deal's on the end of the line. I hooked him down in the deep center of the pool and brought him up."

I thought he had gone crazy. But I looked toward the end of the line and Maxfield wasn't crazy. He was scared white. I felt ice and crawling shivers all over me.

BOBBING up and down, just like a big, spent fish, was the body of Lance Deal. He was dead. The current made his arms and legs move, and he rolled over once. When we saw his face, it was terrifying. It wasn't human. His eyes stared as though he saw something that would frighten the life out of an ordinary mortal.

"Get down there," Maxfield said. "Get him to shore. Help me land him!"

It hit me then that there was something of weird similarity between what Maxfield said about landing Deal's body and landing a big fish. Just as though he'd made the biggest catch of his life and didn't want it to get away. For a flash, I wondered if Maxfield had found Deal at the rapids and had done him in. Neither of them would have hesitated to make way with the other if it had been good business. I knew that.

Just the way Maxfield said that, caused me to force myself to feel Deal's flesh the minute I got hold of the body. The touch was cold and clammy. But I couldn't help but look for sign of a bullet hole, too, because Maxfield had been shooting, and the water was so icy cold a body could have cooled off in a few minutes.

There was no bullet hole. I made certain of that before Maxfield came half tumbling down the shoreline, thrashing through the black alder thickets. I'd just noticed one peculiar thing as Maxfield came. There was a thin, discolored line around Deal's neck, almost as though someone had drawn it with an indelible pencil.

"Artificial respiration; quick, get pumping him to get water out of his lungs," said Maxfield and he hauled Deal up on the rounding granite boulder where we stood.

"He's dead," I told Maxfield. "No chance."

But Maxfield jerked and threw Deal's body around like a bulldog would shake a rat. That's how Deal's body got those abrasions and marks the coroner's jury believed were the result of a fight. Before that the only mark on the body was that purple, pencil-thin line around the neck.

Maxfield was frantic for some reason; maybe because he knew with Deal dead there wouldn't be such outstanding lures made by our company. Anyway, he banged the body around on that slippery, shelving boulder something awful.

"He's dead," I said again. "Quit beating up that body!"

Maxfield turned on me and I thought he was going to strike me, but he stood there, puffing, his big, fat face red with exertion. He was sort of teetering and swaying, and I wondered if he'd pounded up his heart in that fat body, until he was all set for a heart attack and I'd have two dead men on my hands.

I was looking right at Maxfield and he was staring at the limp form of Deal, when I heard the whishing, singing noise, and saw a little object about the size of shotgun cartridge but oval shape, suddenly start circling Maxfield's neck. If finally whipped in and seemed to sink its beak into the heavy flesh. He tried to scream, but choked. His hands clawed at his neck.

Then he seemed to be jerked right off his feet. He landed in the water. He began swimming. I saw his full strength go into trying to paddle back to shore, but he failed. He was a superb swimmer, but he was being pulled back into the cold, dark

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water. I saw he was trying to call for help, but there was no sound.

I went in after him, got hold of his hair, but something yanked him away. I reached again and again, but it was just like trying to net a trout that hasn't fully tired. He was even yanked upstream, against the current, and each moment he was getting weaker. Finally he was under for several minutes and I knew he was dead.

I GOT back to the rock where Deal's body lay. I stood there for several minutes, panting and all braced. I sensed some unseen force that had reached out to yank both Deal and Maxfield into the river and play them to their death just as they had stood so many times in the same spot, gloating over the fish they hauled out of the water just to kill.

It was the same singing, swishing sound that warned me, and I caught a glimpse of that thing that had slapped into Maxfield's neck. It whipped around, above my shoulders, like a giant bee, or a winged spider, weaving a thread and I felt the thread. Then I was yanked toward the water.

It must have been instinct that caused me to catch the object and spin it into unwinding the unseen thing around my own neck. Maybe I had a flash of what had happened to both Deal and Maxfield. I don't know. I tried to hang onto the object but it was jerked free and went skipping across the water. There was no visible power pulling it. It just seemed to fly without wings.

It was nearly dark. I dragged Deal's body into camp. I sat around, thinking, not daring to even light a fire. There was no point in going back to the pool to try to get Maxfield out; he was certainly dead.

All through the night, I sat, with my camp pistol in my hands, waiting for that invisible thing to reach out, wrap itself around my neck, and maybe this time drag me into the lake. By dawn I had done a lot of thinking, and I was still alive.

I got into the canoe, went to the opposite side of the pool from where Maxfield and I had stood. I examined the shoreline, back of some thick, screening willows that were about as high as a man. I found footprints of a man. I followed them to an old tumble-down cabin in a clearing a mile or so back in the woods. I looked across the opening and saw a heavy, steel casting rod standing against a big pine that had stout spread-out limbs.

I saw something else.

The body of a man was suspended in mid-air, between the ground and one of the stoutest limbs of the old pine. He seemed to be just floating there with no support. He was dead.

That was Nicholas D'Fanger. You'll find him still there, as though floating, defying gravity and all other natural forces.

When you go there to find him, you'll find the answer to all this. You'll not make the charges of murder against me as you have planned. I am innocent.

Examine D'Fanger's body as I did and perhaps you'll still not believe the truth. But if you will believe the truth after you have felt it between your own fingers, you'll know how D'Fanger cast that plug and what gripped the necks of Maxfield, Deal and myself, and how those other two were played to their death in the dark river, just as they had so often played fish there.

D'Fanger apparently went back into the tackle business after the war, working alone. He had developed a synthetic fish-line that was totally invisible. It has tensile strength beyond anything known. One thread of it is holding D'Fanger's body where he hanged himself from the old pine, and that line may have a breaking test greater than any line known. You can feel it, if you touch it, but you cannot see it.

I doubt if any chemist ever will be able to analyze it. Probably both Deal and Maxfield had known about the line and had tried that. When they failed, Deal was moving to trap D'Fanger and force the secret from him. Even then Deal might never have been able to apply what he had learned. For I believe that it is not chemistry that makes that line invisible, but D'Fanger had found something in his searching of the supernatural, maybe some old magic incantation, that made the line invisible. Whatever it might have been, the secret is lost in D'Fanger's death.

That is my story. It is true. Now, if you will follow me, I'll guide you to where Nicholas D'Fanger's body seems to float in thin air.

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PAY-OFF AT TAMARACK PASS

By JACK RUTHERFORD

THE lips of the young fellow on the bed were moving. He was trying to ask a question and finding it difficult. His throat hurt and his mouth was stiff and numb from the bandages he had worn so long.

The doctor didn't seem to notice this as he stepped back from the bed with the last piece of bandage dangling in his hand. He stood there for a long minute, his keen eyes going over every detail of the job he had done on the patient's face. "Pretty good," he murmured and he was speaking entirely to himself.

The little gray-haired nurse said, "He's trying to ask you what happened to his face, Doctor."

The doctor's face was impersonal as he met the inquiring eyes of the young man on the bed. "You'll probably never know what struck you, or just who did it," he said. "The blow that fractured your skull came from behind, I guess. A gun barrel—piece of pipe—something like that. I think it was boot heels that crushed your face and your larynx. Somebody tried to stomp the life out of you. Or deliberately tried to mutilate your face till your body wouldn't be recognized."

He turned to the nurse. "Don't let him try to talk, for a while. That larynx was just about wrecked. I've done the best I could with it."

The doctor had spent a lot of time on this patient who had been found in an empty box car, down in the Ogden railroad yards. Partly because he had a special interest in the type of surgery required. But now it was a finished job and he was a busy man. There was a touch of dry humor in his eyes as he looked at the nurse. "That must have been a hell of a fracas he was mixed up in."

When the doctor was gone the nurse got a little mirror and put it into the young fellow's hand. "Dr. Reed didn't seem to re-

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You Can Forget the Past—Until the Time Comes To Square Up For It

member that it's your face—that you might be interested in what he's done to it."

She stood there watching rather anxiously, as the boy's shocked, bewildered eyes took in the face he saw in the glass. "I know it looks bad now," she said. "The bandages leave it bleached and mottled that way. And it probably isn't just like it was before. It was terribly crushed. I doubt if Dr. Reed could tell just what it looked like before you were hurt."

The young gray eyes were bleak when they turned away from the mirror and appealed to the nurse, but she gave him a reassuring smile. "Your face is going to be all right," she told him. "Dr. Reed has done a wonderful job on it. The features are good. When the sun has had a chance to tan the skin he transplanted from your body and wipe out all those little scars, I think it will be rather a handsome face—a strong one, anyway."

For a long time Dean Hilton lay there looking up at the white ceiling. That doctor was wrong about his being mixed up in some wild fracas. There hadn't been any fight at all. He was walking back to camp that night with the three fellows who helped him drive that bunch of steers from his father's ranch to Winnemucca. He and Shorty Stubbs were walking in front, Verne Coburn and Taggart, the half-breed, coming along behind. They were walking past the railroad yards. He remembered that much clearly, remembered the long strings of idle cars standing on side-tracks. Right there was where everything suddenly blacked out. The next thing he remembered was here in the hospital. They had found him in an empty box car here in Ogden, three hundred miles from Winnemucca.

He wondered what his father had thought during all the weeks he had been lying here in the hospital. He ought to have written a letter, but what could he write? He hadn't gambled that night, hadn't really been drunk. But he had wandered around that dark, tough little shipping town till midnight, drinking here and there, with all that money he got for the steers in his pocket. It

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wasn't going to be a nice story to tell when he got back home, after all the other foolish things he'd done in the last year.

TWO days after Dean Hilton left the hospital in Ogden he dropped off a freight train in the railroad yards at Winnemucca, a tall, wide-shouldered young fellow whose gray eyes were anything but happy as he walked over to the passenger depot to wash up. He had no horse, no saddle, and no money. He could get them here, but it meant going to somebody who knew him well and explaining everything that had happened.

This hadn't seemed hard to Dean when he first thought about it, but he dreaded it now that he was close to it. He dreaded the curious questions he would have to answer. Wasn't quite sure what his answers would be. Those fellows had done worse than to beat him nearly to death that night. Mingled with the hate he felt for them was a feeling of deep humiliation, a certain sense of degredation. His fierce young pride told him that the terrible abuse he had undergone that night was something that could not happen to a man without leaving a certain stigma.

When he had washed he took a long look in the dirty mirror that hung above the wash bowl. He was touched by a vague sense of unreality as he studied the face that looked back at him. It hard to get used to that face. The peculiar, patched appearance of the transplanted skin had improved some but it still looked splotched and unhealthy. Dean's gray eyes were dubious, a little resentful, as he turned away from the mirror.

He thought he was getting used to the curious glances of strangers, but they bothered him a lot today as he walked along past the square-fronted buildings that faced the railroad tracks. A young puncher who rode up to a hitching rack sat in his saddle for a long moment watching him pass before he got off his horse. A nice-looking old lady was trying hard not to stare as he met her on the board sidewalk, but he could feel her quick, intent glance as plainly as if she had reached out and touched him.

He went first to a store where he and his father had often bought supplies for the ranch. Jim Daniels, the owner, was a friendly, talkative man. He would want to know all about what had happened to Dean, down to the last detail. But Dean had to have some money and felt sure that Daniels would let him have it.

He entered the store reluctantly, but his pulse quickened when he saw the familiar face of the tall old man who was busy just now with a lady customer and a bolt of cloth that was partly unrolled on the counter. He was just ready to say, "Hello, Jim," when Daniels glanced up at him and nodded. "Be with you in a minute, young man," he said, and there wasn't a thing in his voice or face to show that he had ever seen Dean before. He was being courteous to a young stranger who had dropped into his store for the first time.

For a moment Dean stood there staring at Daniels, unable to believe that the old man hadn't recognized him. It didn't seem possible. Daniels had known him since he was a small boy and he was the kind of man who didn't forget people. He stood there waiting for the storekeeper to finish with his customer and several times he caught the tall old man looking at him. There was only curiosity in his eyes. There wasn't a sign of recognition.

At another time Dean might have found some humor in a situation like this, but just now it struck him with a terrific impact. Something close to panic built up in him as he stood there waiting to talk to this man who didn't know him. He suddenly decided that he wasn't going to make any explanations or ask for any money. He turned his head and looked back at the door, thinking he would offer some excuse and get out. Just then Daniels' customer turned away from the counter and the storekeeper spoke to Dean. "All right, young man. What can I do for you today?"

Dean hesitated for a moment, then he stepped up to the counter and said as casually as he could: "I thought you might be able to give me—some information." His hand went up to his throat as his voice broke badly. Talking was still hard for him.

Jim Daniels' eyes went over the bleached, scarred face of the tall young fellow across the counter. Glad to help you—if I can," he said, and then he went on, "You look like you've had some hard luck. Been sick, or something?"

Dean nodded. "Pretty sick," he said and

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added quickly, "I heard that Tom Hilton trades with you a good deal. Do you know if he or anybody from his ranch is in town or is expected right away?"

"No," Daniels said. "Tom Hilton's place is three or four days' drive from here. He doesn't come in very often." Then he added, "Dean Hilton, Tom's son, was in here quite a long time ago. Just before he skipped out with all that money."

Something in the face of the young fellow across the counter must have caught the old storekeeper's eye, for he asked, "Do you know Dean Hilton?"

Dean nodded his head. "Yes, I know him."

"I guess you haven't heard about it then. Dean brought in a bunch of Tom's steers and skipped out with the money he got for them. Over three thousand dollars, they say. I guess there's no mistake about it. Verne Coburn is Tom's nephew and he was in here the next day. He told me Dean got into a poker game and lost part of the money. I guess he was afraid to go back home then, so he skipped out with the rest of it. Verne said he hated like hell to take a story like that back to Tom Hilton, but I guess he had to do it."

Dean stood there dazed for a moment. He hadn't thought Coburn and the other fellows would have the nerve to go back to the ranch after they had robbed him and left him for dead. He had pictured them getting away from this part of the country fast, drifting off somewhere with that three thousand dollars.

But they *had* gone back, and this was the story they had taken to his father.

But Daniels was still talking. "It's too damned bad. They say Tom's all broken up about it. He's always been wrapped up in that kid and I guess Dean's gone pretty wild the last year or so. They say Tom's paid a lot of his gambling debts and helped him out of a lot of holes. He's probably a lot better off without the kid."

This last was too much for Dean. No boy ever had a kinder father than his was, and for the last year or two no boy had deserved it less. He stood there looking down at the counter, seeing nothing. His throat was too tight to speak. He turned blindly away from the counter and started to get out of the store. But Daniels called him back. "Say, young man, if you're looking for a job—" He hesitated as he looked into the bleak, unhappy eyes Dean turned on him for a moment. "You don't look to me like you ought to go to work yet, but I know a man that needs some help. He's driving a bunch of horses clear down to New Mexico. Name's Roberts and you can find him at the Commercial House, if you're interested."

"Thanks," Dean said. "I think I'd like a job like that." As he stepped out into the street he added to himself. "The farther it takes me away the better."

TWO years later Dean Hilton rode into the little town of Pine Creek, eight miles from his father's ranch. He had finally given in to the urge that had pulled him back toward home during the long months he had been away. He was not sure now that he would go to see his father, but he had to know about him. If his father was getting along better without him, he would ride on and let it stand that way. He was homesick but he had decided long ago that his own feelings must not count. His father was what counted. Nothing else.

The cold, consuming hate he felt toward the three men who had made him an outcast was just as strong as it had been two years ago. A thousand times he had felt his blood surge as he thought of running into these men again. But his pictures of the deadly reckoning he would have with them were always set in places far away from that peaceful ranch where he had been born. His father's rugged, kindly face and the things his father had stood for in that beautiful mountain valley could never be a part of the kind of reckoning he would have some day with Coburn and Taggart and Shorty Stubbs. That could wait, too, if necessary.

He rode along the wide, dusty wagon road that led through the little town, a tall, wide-shouldered young fellow with a solid, durable-looking mount and a wise old pack horse that jogged along abreast of the rider to avoid the dust. His smooth, deeply tanned face was youthful but there was strength and purpose in the wide, firm mouth and solid jaw. There was little in that face to suggest the reckless, carefree boy Dean Hilton had been when he rode away from here two years ago.

He didn't expect to be recognized but he

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had a moment of doubt when he rode up to the livery stable and old Hank Dawes limped out to take his horses. Hank had worked for his father till a horse fell on that leg. He had known Dean most of his life, but there was nothing more than a mild curiosity in his faded blue eyes as he sized up the tall, good-looking young rider and the unfamiliar brands on his horses.

"Come quite a ways, haven't you?" Old Hank observed as Dean stepped down from his horse.

Dean had noticed Hank's scrutiny of the brands on the horses. "Why, yes," he said smiling. "The Circle F on this horse is a New Mexico brand. The JF on the pack horse belongs down in Arizona."

Old Hank sized up the horses for a moment then he grunted. "You've taken damned good care of them. Lot of fellows can use up a horse worse than that on a two-day trip."

Dean smiled but he wanted to laugh. He knew that Hank's big interest in life was horses. He would hand Hank something that the old fellow had said to him a hundred times when he was a boy. "I think it always pays off, in the long run, to take good care of a horse," he said, watching old Hank for his reaction.

"You're damned right," Hank said and Dean knew that he had made a friend. He stood there for five minutes listening as Hank expounded his Gospel on horses. It was like being home again.

He had thought of Hank Dawes during his long ride up from Arizona. Hank had worked for Tom Hilton for a good many years. It was Tom Hilton's money that bought the livery stable and set the crippled puncher up in the kind of business he would like best. If anybody knew how things were going with Tom Hilton, it would be Hank Dawes.

That evening after supper, Dean went back to the livery stable and found Hank Dawes in his combined office and gear room. "I thought I'd take a look at the ponies before I went to bed," he told Hank.

HANK had taken a liking to this young fellow and he liked him still better when Dean took notice of the scrupulous job that had been done in rubbing down and caring for the horses. "Come in and sit down a while," he said. "It's too early for a young fellow like you to go to bed."

"I think I might work around here for a while," Dean said, after he had been talking to the old fellow for a few minutes. "I've heard about the Hilton outfit. Do you think that would be a good place to work?"

Hank didn't answer immediately. He sat there looking down at the floor, then reached down with both hands and adjusted the crippled leg that pointed straight out from the low chair he sat on. "It ought to be a good place to work," he finally said. "Tom Hilton's the finest man I ever knew. But Tom's not able to do much about running things now, and I don't think you'd like to work for Verne Coburn. That's his nephew."

"You mean Tom Hilton is sick, or something?" Dean asked. It was hard to keep the anxiety out of his voice.

"Yes—he's crippled." Dean sensed a driving anger back of the old fellow's words. "They *claim* it was a busted cinch that done it.

"Things haven't been going good out there," Hank went on. "About all Tom's old hands have quit. Couldn't get along with Coburn. Juan, the old Spaniard that's always been Tom's range boss, he got bushwhacked by somebody—shot in the hip so he can't ride. They're losing a lot of cattle, too. Can't tell where they go to. No. I wouldn't advise any man to get a job out there."

For a long time Dean sat there sober and quiet. His father *had* needed him. All these things had happened while he was wandering around, feeling sorry for himself. He carefully rolled a cigarette, taking a long time to do it. When he had it lighted he said, "Maybe I ought to get a job out there, anyway. Maybe the right kind of a man could help Tom Hilton."

Old Hank sat there looking into the earnest, sober face of this young stranger who had just come riding in from far off places. He couldn't have explained it but this young fellow wasn't like a stranger at all. He was like someone Hank had known for years. "If you're going to work out there—" he began, then got stiffly out of his chair and hobbled over to one corner of the room. "Come over here. I want to show you something."

He reached up to a nail on the wall and

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took down a saddle cinch, or rather the two halves of a cinch that had parted almost in the middle. "Take a look at that," he said, handing one end of it to Dean.

Dean took a quick look at the piece of cinch, then carried it over to a bracket lamp that hung on one wall of the room. At first it was just a broken cinch, but his eyes narrowed as he studied it closely. "That's not a break," he said, looking up at Hank Dawes. "Somebody's done a smooth job to make it look like a break, but these fibers have been cut."

"Hell, yes," old Hank broke out. "Of course, they've been cut. Well, that's the cinch that broke and crippled Tom Hilton when he roped a big steer out of the brush. Jack Davis had a row with Coburn and quit out there. He didn't say anything to Hilton about the cinch. Wasn't sure enough about it. But he brought it in here and we went over it together. Somebody wanted to kill Tom Hilton or wanted to cripple him up so he couldn't ride."

DEAN rode out of town next day, leading his pack horse, but he didn't go to the Hilton Ranch. That night he camped in a little meadow close to the foot of timbered mountains, east of Hilton range. He rode away from this secluded camp before it was light next morning and an hour later was over on his father's range riding past scattered bunches of cattle. Twice that day he caught sight of distant horsemen riding in pairs and each time he eased his own horse off on lower ground, where he would not be seen.

When Dean finished his second day of riding he had a clear picture of what was happening on his father's range. The cows were there, the calves and young stock; but the steers and dry cows that would bring top prices for beef were not there—not half of them. It wasn't the work of ordinary rustlers who slipped in on a range and got away fast with a bunch of cattle. It was a careful, systematic job that couldn't be carried on unless Coburn and his riders were in on it. Dean's young face was set in grim lines as he turned back toward his camp. This was why his father and Juan had been crippled so they couldn't ride, why Coburn had got rid of all the old hands on the ranch.

It was getting dark when he rode up to his camp, and just as he reached it he saw something move among the pines above him. He took a close look and made out the outline of a man sitting on a horse, partly concealed by a tree. He decided to pretend that he hadn't noticed. He rode ahead a few steps and got down from his horse, careful to keep the horse between himself and the rider on the hill. A moment later the man rode out of the trees and slanted down to the camp, a short blocky figure on a big horse. A wave of anger swept over Dean as he recognized Pete Taggart, the half-breed. He had always thought it was Taggart who had crushed his face with his boot heels. The half-breed was just brutal enough to do a thing like that.

Dean loosened his gun in the holster and watched every move the man made, as he rode up close and stopped his horse.

"How long you been camped here?" Taggart asked, and there was nothing in his manner to indicate that he had ever seen Dean before. But this was only a preliminary move. Almost immediately Verne Coburn came out of the timber and rode up beside the half-breed.

"What the hell do you think you're doing here, hombre?" Coburn asked.

It took all the self-control Dean had to hold down his anger as he faced these two men who had robbed him and left him for dead two years ago, but his voice was cool when he answered. "Just camping and fishing a little. Any objections?"

"You're damned right I've got objections," Coburn snapped. "This is Bar S range."

So this was Verne Coburn, with authority back of him, Dean thought, as he watched the fellow's swarthy, rather handsome face. Verne had always been a bully, but having charge of an outfit had developed a puffed-up arrogance in him that amused Dean. He hated the man but could hardly keep from smiling.

"I haven't noticed any cattle around here," Dean said. "Are you sure this is on your range?" He knew that it wasn't on Hilton range and wondered why Coburn was so disturbed by finding him here.

Coburn didn't answer his question. "It's enough for you to know that we don't allow any damned snoopers around here," he snapped.

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"That sounds a little tough," Dean said, watching both men closely. "What do you do with fellows like me when you find them around here."

He preferred not to have it out with them now but he was determined not to let them get any advantage of him. He had been faster with a gun than either of them two years ago and was a lot faster now. He had always counted on meeting these fellows again.

Just then a voice behind him said, "Get 'em up, hombre. I've got you covered."

Dean turned around. Another man was standing behind him, less than twenty yards away, a rifle in his hands. Dean hesitated for a moment. Trying to fight it out against these odds would be next to suicide, but a cold chill ran along his spine as he thought of what Coburn and the half-breed had done to him that other time. Anything would be better than that. But cooler thoughts came in a moment. Coburn and Taggart hadn't recognized him. He felt sure of that. They wouldn't risk killing a stranger, just because they didn't want him around.

He raised his hands shoulder high and turned back to Coburn and the half-breed, to find that both of them now had revolvers in their hands.

"So this is the way you do it," he said, and his lips were smiling a little as he looked at Coburn. "You're a reckless devil. You take too many chances."

"Shut up," Coburn snapped. "You're going in to see Tom Hilton and the sheriff. Red, get his horse. Get something to tie his hands with, Pete."

It was long after dark when Verne Coburn and his helpers arrived at the Hilton Ranch and took their prisoner into the big living room, where Tom Hilton was sitting alone with a newspaper on his lap. The big old rancher didn't get up when Coburn came into the room, followed by the others, but his keen gray eyes were curious as he looked at the young fellow, whose hands were still tied in front of him.

"What's all this, Verne?" he asked.

DEAN had dreaded this moment when he would face his father again. He had tried to prepare himself for it, but it was terrible to stand there looking into that rugged, familiar face without a word of greeting. But Coburn was talking to Hilton. Lying to him.

"We found this fellow snooping around, right in the middle of the range where we've been losing cattle," Coburn said. "He even had the nerve to camp out there—right there on Alder Creek."

He started to go on but Dean cut in on him. "Hold on there, mister. Let's get this straight. You didn't find me snooping around—and you didn't find me on Alder Creek. You found me in my camp on Hawley Creek—in that little meadow, up close to the head of it."

Dean's camp was ten miles from the place Coburn had mentioned. He wasn't going to let the fellow get away with a lie. But he realized the next second that he had blundered in showing too intimate a knowledge of the country they had found him in.

Coburn took it up instantly. "He claims he don't know a thing about this country. Wasn't that what he told us, boys?" He looked at the half-breed and the red-headed young fellow who had helped bring Dean in. They both nodded and he turned back to Hilton. "You can see yourself that he knows all about that creek—name of it and everything. Looks suspicious to me."

This bothered Dean for a moment, then he said, "That's exactly what I told you. But I did have a talk with a man in town before I went out there, the man that runs the livery stable. Dawes—I think his name is."

This was true only as far as it went, for Dean and Hank Dawes hadn't mentioned Hawley Creek in the long talk they had. But it left Coburn tangled up with the lie he had told. His face was furious as he swung around to face Dean.

Dean was smiling now. He showed his tightly tied hands out in front of him. "This might be a good time for you to hit me," he said. "But why do you want to lie about where you found me? You wouldn't let me bring my pack horse and camp outfit along. They're out there now on Hawley Creek—if Mr. Hilton wants to check up on what you've been telling him."

He was hoping that Coburn would hit him while his hands were tied. He knew Tom Hilton's sense of fairness and was willing to take a hard punch in the face if Tom Hilton could see it. But this wasn't

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necessary. There were signs of growing anger in the big old cowman's face as he looked at Coburn.

"I don't see why you had to tie this boy's hands," he said. "There were three of you to bring him in." Without waiting for further explanations he got up from his chair, reached for the big pocket-knife he always carried, and limped over to Dean.

Dean wanted to grip the big, corded hand that held the knife, wanted desperately to feel his father's arm about his shoulders, as it had been so many times. But he stood there very still holding out his tied hands. "Thank you, sir," he said, and he couldn't have said more just then.

"You boys can go and get your supper now," Hilton told Coburn and the other two men. "I'll talk to this young man a while."

"I think we ought to take him on in to the sheriff," Coburn said. "After all the cattle we've lost, I think he'd like to check up on any strangers we find snooping around on our range."

"I can tell about that when I've talked to him," Hilton said shortly, and Coburn didn't dare to persist. He had lost a lot of ground with Tom Hilton during the last few minutes.

"Sit down," Hilton said when the other men were out of the room and through force of habit Dean took the big chair he had always used when he and his father were in the living-room.

"I guess I didn't ask you your name," the old rancher said, eyeing the young stranger rather sharply.

"It's Barrett—Dave Barrett," Dean said, taking the same name he had used for the past two years. He hadn't lied to his father in the old days, no matter how tight a squeeze he was in, and it wasn't easy now.

"You mentioned Hank Dawes a while ago," Hilton said. "Do you know Hank?"

"Why, no," Dean said. "I don't really know him, but I talked with him quite a lot when I stayed in town overnight." He thought of something else then and added, "I'd just got here from down in Arizona. I made the trip in twelve days but I took pretty good care of my horses. They were in good shape when I rode into town and for some reason it seemed to please Dawes a lot. We got pretty friendly."

This struck Tom Hilton just as Dean knew it would. He and his father had laughed a lot of times over Hank's one obsession. The keen scrutiny in the old rancher's eyes gave way to a twinkle, and then he chuckled. "No wonder Hank got friendly with you," he said. "If Hank has any religion at all, it's all mixed up with horses. He *judges* men by the way they treat their horses."

Tom Hilton didn't have many questions to ask. He couldn't have told why he had accepted this young stranger, but he had. Just as old Hank Dawes had accepted him a few days before. They sat there talking for some time and Dean seemed to lose the sense of strain he had felt when he first faced his father. He kept himself constantly on guard, but at times it was hard to believe that he and his father were not just having one of their long talks after they had been apart for a few days.

But the hardest test of all was still to come. As he and his father talked, Dean heard somebody moving about in the kitchen and knew immediately that it was Anita, the little Spanish woman who had been almost a mother to him after his own mother had died. Anita and Juan lived in a little cottage Tom Hilton had built for them, but she had always kept house for Hilton and his son and often came back to the kitchen at night to make some preparations for breakfast.

Dean hoped he wouldn't have to face Anita tonight. No one on earth knew him better. But presently he looked up and she was standing there in the middle of the room, looking first at him and then at his father.

"Excuse me, Senor Tom," she almost whispered. "I theenk I hear—" And then she looked back at Dean and her eyes widened as she stared at him. "Senor Tom! Eet's Deanie's eyes!" Her voice rose and broke, "I theenk—eet's Deanie's eyes."

IT WAS a terrible moment for Dean and not an easy one for Tom Hilton. The big old rancher's eyes were misty as he went over to the little woman and put his arm about her shoulders.

"You're all upset, Anita," he said as if he were talking to a frightened child. "Take a good look at this young man. Don't you

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remember Deanie's nose? It turned up like his mamma's did. A sassy Irish nose. Remember, Anita? And don't you remember how Deanie's ears stood out a little. You used to scold him about pulling his cap down so tight. You thought that was what did it. Remember, Anita?"

Anita was almost pure Spanish. Some time she had been a beautiful Spanish girl. She was beautiful now to Dean Hilton, as he looked at her wrinkled cheeks, her soft, dark eyes, and the snow-white strands in the black hair that framed her face. Her lips still trembled and her eyes clung to his face as if something about it fascinated her. Even when she turned away, Dean knew that she wasn't satisfied. He would have given years of his life to put his arms around her thin, old shoulders and tell her that she was not mistaken at all. That he loved her just as he always had.

"Anita raised my boy—from the time he was two years old," Hilton explained when she was out of the room. "She and Juan never had any children and she couldn't have thought any more of Dean if he had been her own. He went away two years ago and she can't get over it. I'm worried about her. She didn't act quite right tonight, did she?"

The big old rancher sat there for some time buried in his own thoughts. Dean was glad he didn't want to talk, for his own throat was too tight to answer. Facing Anita that way, without even speaking to her had been tough. And Anita wasn't satisfied, in spite of the things his father had pointed out. Men looked at him and their cold reason brushed aside things that seemed familiar. But Anita hadn't reasoned at all. She didn't need to.

Tom Hilton finally roused himself from his reverie. "There's something about you that reminded me of Dean when you first come into the room tonight," he said. "Before I took a close look at you. Your voice is a little like his, too. That's what brought Anita in here. But it's not clear like Dean's was. You could hear him a mile when he yelled at a bunch of cattle. Anita didn't notice that."

Dean could have told him why his voice was husky. Dr. Reed had not been able to repair all the damage those vicious boot heels had done to his throat.

"I think you'd better sleep here at the house tonight," Hilton said presently. "After what happened tonight, it might not be pleasant at the bunkhouse."

Dean didn't sleep much that night, there in his own room next to his father's. During all the months he had been away he had never been more homesick. He had seen the deep feeling in his father's eyes when he spoke of his missing son. Tom Hilton's heart was big enough to care for his son, even if he believed that son was a weakling. But the story he would have to tell his father looked bad tonight. Worse than it ever had been before. No. He couldn't come back that way, no matter how homesick he was. He couldn't be Dean Hilton again till Dean Hilton's name was clear of the story that everybody had believed for the past two years.

He ate breakfast with his father next morning and there he had to face Anita again and Juan, the tall, old Spanish *vaquero* who had always been much closer to him and his father than any other man on the ranch. He had dreaded meeting Juan after his encounter with Anita last night. Those deep-set, black eyes of old Juan's never *seemed* intent on anything, but they never missed anything, either. They were sharp enough to pick up the brand on a cow at almost incredible distances or follow a faint trail that didn't mean a thing to other men.

"This young man's name is Dave Barrett, Juan," Tom Hilton said, and Dean's breath came more freely. There was nothing more than polite acknowledgement in the old Spaniard's eyes.

LOOKING at Juan across the table, Dean felt some of the boyish admiration he'd always had for this tall, silent old Spaniard who could catch a calf at the end of a sixty-foot reata or break a wild horse in two, as he stood on the ground with a rope across his thigh. He was one of those rare, old-time *vaqueros* whose uncanny knowledge of cattle was no greater than his loyalty to Tom Hilton.

"Juan here was my riding boss for over twenty years," Tom Hilton told Dean. "But we're both cripples now. Neither one of us can ride."

But Dean knew that Juan could ride. Last night when he couldn't sleep he

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had gone over to the window and sat there for a long time looking out over the familiar fields back of the house. He had seen someone lead a horse out of the little barn back of Juan's cottage, where the old Spaniard had always kept a favorite horse in the old days. It must have been around midnight, and the tall man who pulled himself slowly into the saddle was Juan. There was no mistaking that tall figure, even in the dark.

Tom Hilton was silent for a moment when Dean asked him about a riding job, and Dean knew why he hesitated. His father's mind was going over what had happened last night. He was afraid that hiring this young fellow would stir up trouble in the outfit.

"Why, I guess we can use you," he finally said. "Till after the beef roundup, anyway." He looked at Dean rather sharply, and added, "I'm not sure that Verne will want you, after what happened last night, and I don't know how you feel toward him. But he's responsible for the range work since Juan and I got hurt. I'll expect you to get along with him and with the other men. I don't stand for any fighting or trouble in the outfit."

It was very still in the big ranchhouse kitchen as Dean sat there with his father's eyes on him. With old Anita standing over by the big stove, very still, her eyes anxious and almost pathetically puzzled as she looked at them. "Thank you, sir," Dean said. "I'd like to try it a while. I'll try not to cause any trouble."

He didn't begin work that day. He wanted to go back to his camp and pick up his pack horse and outfit. And he wanted to find out, if he could, why Coburn had been so furious when he found him camped on that little creek, miles away from Hilton range.

He didn't go directly to his camp, but cut past it toward a deep cleft in the timbered mountains back of it. The little creek he had camped on led out to Tamarack Pass, one of the few good passes through the rough mountains that lay east of his father's range. When he struck the trail that led through the pass he followed it, stopping now and then to study the tracks along it. A small bunch of cattle had been driven along here only a few days ago. They were not stock cattle, with a lot of calves mixed in. The beef cattle missing from Tom Hilton's range were being driven through this pass. No wonder Coburn didn't want anybody camped near here.

There was no show of open hostility when Dean walked into the bunkhouse with his blanket roll that evening. But Dean wasn't deceived by this. Coburn knew how Tom Hilton felt about bunkhouse rows and this hand-picked crew would follow Coburn's lead. Except for Coburn and the other two who had brought him in last night, there wasn't a man there that Dean had ever seen before. All of the oldtimers who had worked for Tom Hilton were gone.

At supper that evening Coburn announced that the outfit would work Cherry Canyon the next day, and then he looked at Dean and said, "That ought to be right along your line, Barrett, if you've worked down along the Border."

Dean had helped to work that canyon a dozen times. It was full of quaking-asp, wild cherry and other brush. The old, high-horned cows and big steers that preferred to run in there were as wild as elk. A lot of them always had to be roped to get them out at all. It was a rough, dangerous job that Dean had always liked, but he wondered why Coburn was doing it now. The steers that came out of the canyon were hard to hold and Juan had always left them till the end of the beef roundup.

After supper Dean occupied himself for a while with an old magazine he had found in the bunkhouse, while most of the others sat in on a game of poker. They didn't invite him to sit in and he didn't want to. Before he went to bed he decided to go out to the saddle room and check up on his outfit. Roping steers in that rough canyon tried out a man's rigging as few jobs would and everything needed to be sound.

As he approached the saddle room he saw that there was a light inside and then he saw the tall, dark figure of a man standing close to the window through which the light came. It was old Juan, and his actions puzzled Dean. Why would Juan be standing there in the dark looking into that window so intently? The old Spaniard started a little and turned his head when he heard Dean walk up behind him. He didn't speak when he saw who it was. He made a slight motion with his hand toward

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the lighted window and stepped aside a little so Dean could look in.

INSIDE the room, Pete Taggart, the half-breed, was working on a saddle, Dean's saddle. He was doing a careful job on the cinch. He had it laid out on the floor and was crouched on his knees, working it over with the short, thin blade of a pocket knife. He was setting a deadly trap for the man who would rope a wild steer and take his turns on the horn of that saddle.

Dean didn't stop to speak to Juan. He took one look through the window, walked over to the door and threw it wide open. He didn't pause when Taggart sprang to his feet and dropped the knife. He stepped in on him and struck, just as the stocky half-breed's hand streaked for his holster. The blow caught Taggart on the jaw and he fell flat on his back, but the revolver was out of its holster almost as soon as he struck the floor. Dean's cool, gray eyes were watching every move. Before Taggart could raise the gun, a boot heel smashed down on his wrist with a man's full weight back of it.

The revolver dropped from the half-breed's numbed hand but he came back up on his feet like a cat. He got another pile-driver blow on his neck and jaw before he was set to receive it. This time he stayed down. Dean stood over him, his face white with fury. "I ought to stomp your damned face off," he said.

There was a yell at the door. The next moment Coburn and several others piled into the room. "What the hell's going on here?" Coburn snapped.

This interruption seemed to put a check on the driving anger that Dean had felt for the past few seconds. He kicked Taggart's gun across the floor and turned to face the men who had just come in. "Just what do you think has been going on?" he asked, eyeing Coburn deliberately. "It looks to me like your damned half-breed got himself knocked down."

Taggart was getting back on his feet now and the room was deadly still. Dean stood there looking at the hostile faces turned on him. He knew he was in a tight place, expected the silence to be broken any second by the crash of guns. Then he heard old Juan's voice outside the door.

One of Coburn's punchers had been standing at the door when Juan stepped up to it. Instead of letting the big old Spaniard through, he deliberately put a hand on either side of the passage and blocked it. Juan waited only a second, then one of his long arms straightened out in a mighty shove. The surprised puncher in the doorway staggered halfway across the room before he fully got his feet under him again.

The old vaquero didn't waste a glance on the man he had pushed. He walked over to the saddle Taggart had been working on, went down on one knee, and picked the cinch up off the floor. "I show what ees go on," he said, looking at Coburn. "Thees damn breed—he cut thees ceench." He gripped the cinch with his big corded hands. "Look!" he said, and when he tensed his arms and pulled, the cut fibres gave way and tore like cloth, halfway across the cinch.

There was dead silence in the room as the group of men stood looking down at the old Spaniard and the cut cinch—evidence of the dirty job the half-breed had been doing. Then Juan stood up and pointed a long finger at the half-breed. "I theenk—you cut Senor Tom's ceench—too." His words followed each other slowly as if the thought was just forming in his mind, but hate burned in his deep-set, somber eyes.

There was tension in the air again, a brittle silence that might explode into action. But Coburn was too smart to let it explode. "Come on, boys, break it up," he snapped and his men turned and began to file out of the room.

Dean picked up his saddle, hung it where it belonged, then turned and grinned at old Juan. "Thanks, Juan. I'd be too full of lead to amount to much, if you hadn't come in just when you did."

They walked over toward Juan's cottage and stopped in the dark to talk. Juan thought they ought to go to Hilton immediately and tell him just what had happened, but Dean shook his head. "Coburn's the man back of all this stuff, Juan. I know he is. I think you pretty near know it, too. If we get the half-breed fired, we just make Coburn cautious. He's the man we've got to catch, Juan."

Juan didn't speak but the very pose of his tall, stiff figure standing there in the dark told Dean that he was asking something that

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was hard for the old vaquero to do. His loyalty to Tom Hilton made it hard. "Give me a little time, Juan. Maybe only a week. I think I can show you who is doing all this."

"But Senor Tom don' like fights," Juan finally said. "I theenk he fire you—eef we don't tell heem why you fight the breed."

Dean chuckled wryly as he pictured himself being fired by his father. "I think that's exactly what would happen, Juan. I think I'd better tell him I want to quit and move on. I'm not going to move on, mind you. But I don't want anybody to know it. Nobody but you, Juan."

The tall old vaquero stood there very still, peering at him through the dark. Dean knew that Juan was puzzled. Why was this young drifter so interested in what was going on at the Hilton Ranch? How could he be so sure about things that Juan, himself, had only suspected? Dean felt a strong urge to tell him everything but decided against it. That must come later.

He turned away but stopped after he had taken a few steps. "Oh, Juan. Be careful about your riding at night. You might get another bullet if they find out about it."

Old Juan was standing there, looking down at the ground, but his head jerked erect at Dean's words and his whole figure straightened. "I don' theenk anybody know I ride," he said slowly. "Nobody but Anita."

THE second day after he left the Hilton Ranch Dean led his pack horse into a timbered canyon, high up in the mountains north of Tamarack Pass. He had gone to town for supplies, borrowed a strong pair of field glasses that somebody had left at Hank Dawes' stable. Then he rode out of town on the main road that led north. No one but Hank Dawes and old Juan knew that he hadn't drifted out of the country.

The next morning his bacon and coffee were on the fire when it was still dark in the little canyon. At sunrise he was ten miles away from his camp on a timbered hill that overlooked Hilton range. Several mornings later he was riding through the scrub pines that covered the top of a high ridge when he caught the movement of cattle far off to the south. He pulled his horse to a stop and got out his field glasses. The three men back of those cattle were not driving them in a compact mass that would leave a plain trail. They were urging them just enough to keep them moving east, toward Tamarack Pass.

Dean's eyes were thoughtful as he put his glasses back in their case. He glanced up at the sun, then looked out over the ten or twelve-mile stretch of country that lay between the slowly moving cattle and the foot of the pass. He had to see those cattle driven through the pass, had to know who was driving them. But if old Juan could see it, too, this part of the job he had set for himself would be finished. He turned his horse back up the ridge, riding cautiously till he got into heavy timber at the foot of the mountains, then he touched the brown with his spurs and let him out to a long lope.

That evening just after sundown Dean rode cautiously through the timber above the little meadow where he had been camped when Coburn hustled him to the ranch. Old Juan was with him. The fast ride from the ranch had been tough for the old vaquero. His injured leg almost caved under him when they got off their horses close to the edge of the timber, but his eyes were smoldering. He shook his head impatiently when Dean wanted him to sit down and rest.

Dean led the way down the slope to a place where he could see down the narrow valley of the little creek, then he looked back at Juan and nodded his head. Down there less than a mile away, a small herd of cattle was moving up the valley and three men were driving them.

"We got here in time, Juan," Dean said with a long sigh of relief. "When we know who those hombres are we'll have the whole thing in a sack."

He started to move down closer to the creek when a muttered "Hold eet!" from the old Spaniard stopped him. Down there two or three hundred yards away and barely visible through the trees, two men were sitting on the ground while their horses browsed on the lush grass. He and Juan backed off a little and circled the hillside till a growth of small pines hid them from the men below. Then they crept down as close as they dared to go.

They had just settled themselves when something familiar in the appearance of one of the men caught Dean's attention. He took a quick look with his glasses then offered the glasses to Juan. "Take a look at

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that nearest hombre, Juan, and see if you know him."

"I don' need glasses," Juan said. "Thees fellow ees Shorty Stubbs. He work for Senor Tom one time."

"How long ago was that?"

The old Spaniard was thoughtful for a moment. "I theenk about two years. He go to Winnemucca weeth cattle. He don' come back."

Shorty Stubbs was one of the three men who had been with Dean that night in Winnemucca. He had never been quite sure that Shorty was in on the things that had happened that night, but he was sure of it now. And Shorty was still mixed up with Coburn.

They didn't have to wait long till Dean felt certain about two of the men who were driving the cattle. He took the glasses away from his eyes and offered them to Juan. "I think I know who two of them are, Juan. Want to take a look?"

His first glance at Juan showed him that the old vaquero didn't need the glasses. A deep, consuming anger burned in Juan's black eyes. "Thees man on sorrel horse ees Coburn—an' red-head fallow. An' thees damn breed."

When the cattle came closer the two fellows waiting in the meadow rode out and joined the three men driving them. All five of them drew their horses together and talked for a few minutes, then Coburn and the two men with him started back toward the ranch. Shorty Stubbs and his partner took over the small herd and started it toward Tamarack Pass.

"All right, Juan," Dean said. "There's where your cattle are going."

Juan only nodded but his grim, somber face showed what this meant to him. Next to Anita, Tom Hilton and Tom Hilton's cattle had been the big things in the old vaquero's life for more than thirty years. Dean knew that his own part in this was finished. This story, told by old Juan, would leave no doubt in the mind of Tom Hilton, the sheriff, or anybody else who knew Juan.

WHEN the last rider was out of sight they climbed back up the hill to their horses, old Juan's lame leg stiff and slow from squatting on the ground. "Eet ees what fool Senor Tom an' me," Juan said. "They don't ride much at night. They don't go way from ranch—very long any time."

Dean nodded his head. "That's why they got away with it so long. Shorty Stubbs takes care of all the night riding. I'll bet he drives the cattle away and sells them, too. Then comes back here and splits up with Coburn."

"There's one more thing I want to do tonight," he told Juan when they were back to their horses. "There must be a big herd of cattle back of the mountains somewhere —where Shorty's gang are holding them. If I can follow these fellows through the pass tonight, they'll take me right to the main herd. You can go on back to the ranch and tell Tom Hilton what we saw out here."

But Juan didn't see it that way. "You don' go alone," he said. "I go weeth you." And he was stubborn about it when Dean tried to argue with him.

Shortly after dark Dean and Juan were riding carefully along behind the black, moving mass that marked the progress of the stolen cattle. They didn't ride together, for Dean thought this would increase their chance of being seen. "I'll ride just close enough to keep track of them," he told Juan. "And you can ride close enough to keep track of me."

He had a second reason for this. Old Juan didn't have any use for guns. He wouldn't carry a revolver and he wouldn't be very good with the saddle gun that Dean had insisted on his bringing along on this trip.

Dean didn't want to run into these fellows tonight, didn't think he would. But if there was any fighting he didn't want Juan mixed up in it.

He rode along the dark trail on a loose rein, giving his horse a chance to avoid the rocks. He kept back out of sight of the cattle and the men driving them, judging his distance by occasional bawls from steers that resented being driven off the home range. He thought he was playing it safe, but just as he entered the narrow part of the pass somebody hailed him from behind a tall clump of brush that grew beside the trail. "Who is that?" the voice asked, and it was the voice of Shorty Stubbs.

Dean couldn't see the man and didn't stop to answer. He wheeled his horse, socked him with the spurs, and threw himself low

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on one side just as two quick shots blasted behind him.

Almost instantly he heard the pounding of hoofs back of him and knew he would either have to outrun this fellow or fight it out with him. He had already spoiled any chance of following the men to the stolen herd and decided that he might as well fight it out with Shorty now. But old Juan was somewhere down the trail and Dean didn't want to lead the fight into him. He had a pretty good lead and when he reached a place where the sides of the canyon didn't seem to be quite so steep he suddenly sheered away from the trail.

His horse pounded along the steep side of the canyon for perhaps a hundred yards before Dean pulled him up a little and looked back. Shorty Stubbs had left the trail, too.

He and his horse were only a silhouette in the dim light, but they were coming on at a run. "All right, this is it," Dean thought. He wheeled his horse and rode straight at the other man with his six-shooter in his hand.

For a few seconds he and Shorty Stubbs were running toward each other along the dark hillside, shooting as fast as they could pull their triggers, but just when it seemed that their horses would pile into each other, Shorty buckled sidewise and slipped out of the saddle.

Dean checked his horse and rode back to the man lying on the dark hillside. He was just ready to swing out of his saddle when he heard three shots down in the canyon. He didn't stop to look at Shorty Stubbs, didn't stop to reload his gun, but jammed it into the holster and jerked his rifle from the saddle boot. Somewhere down there that other fellow had run into old Juan. And those shots had come from a revolver, not from the old rifle Juan was carrying.

The tough, sure-footed Morgan lunged down the steep, dark slope, its hind feet sliding at times till its haunches touched the hillside. But it seemed to Dean that he was moving at a snail's pace, and the dead silence down in the canyon sickened him.

He hit the bottom of the canyon on a run and kept on down it for several hundred yards before he saw a tall figure standing by the trail. It was old Juan and when Dean dashed up to him the old vaquero was pulling in and coiling up the long rawhide reata that always hung at his saddle-horn.

"What happened, Juan! Where's that other fellow!" Dean shot at him as he pulled his horse to a sliding stop.

Old Juan went on coiling up the reata. "I rope heem," he said slowly. "I guess I breck hees neck."

Dean stared at him for a moment, then he chuckled. "You didn't think of your rifle. Did you, Juan?"

"I don' theenk I shoot good—een the dark," Juan said. "I let heem chase me—then I double back and rope heem."

DEAN could picture what had happened along that dark trail, almost as if he had seen it. That tough-looking rustler they had seen with Shorty Stubbs. Tearing along behind old Juan, shooting wildly. Then that marvelous old roping horse of Juan's had made a lightning swerve out of the trail and stopped. The next second Juan's deadly accurate reata was in the air.

He got off his horse and walked down to the man lying beside the trail. He couldn't tell whether the fellow's neck was broken or not, but he was very dead.

"I shot Shorty Stubbs off of his horse back there," Dean said when he went back to Juan. "I guess we'd better go and see if he's alive."

The old Spaniard said nothing but even in the dim light Dean could see that his face was grim. Juan had seen death in quick and violent forms during his long years on the range, but he had never killed a man before. Dean thought of that broken, huddled thing lying down there by the trail. Taking his reata off that limp body hadn't been easy for Juan.

Shorty Stubbs was alive and conscious. He was lying on his back but managed to raise himself on one elbow a little when they walked up to him. Even in the dim light he recognized the tall figure of old Juan.

"Is that you, Juan?" he asked weakly.

"Yes," Juan said. "Where you heet, Shorty?"

"Chest," Shorty said. "Guess I'm bleeding to death."

"We'd better take a look at it," Dean told Juan. "If you'll light some matches I'll get his coat and shirt out of the way."

He stooped over the man, took him by

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the shoulder, and carefully pulled him around till his head was up the slope of the hill. Then he knelt down and went to work on the clothes. Shorty's face was white and sick in the flickering light from the matches that Juan held down close. He was scared as well as sick.

The bullet had struck him low down in the shoulder. He was bleeding a lot, but his chest hadn't been touched. Dean leaned over and took a careful look at the wound, then he stood up. "I think a doctor could fix you up," he said. "But you'll never live long enough to get to a doctor—unless that bleeding is stopped."

He stood there as if he were through with the whole matter, got out papers and tobacco and rolled a cigarette, very deliberately. He offered the makings to Juan before he put them back in his pocket but Juan shook his head.

"Maybe we better feex the bandage—right away," Juan said nervously when the silence had run on for a long minute or two.

"No, Juan," Dean said abruptly. "This fellow here can tell some things I want to know. He's going to tell me, too—or he can stay right where he is and bleed to death."

He let this ride for a moment while old Juan stared at him, then he squatted down close to the man on the ground. "What I want to know about is that night in Winnemucca, Stubbs. The night you and Coburn and the half-breed robbed Dean Hilton and beat him till you thought he was dead."

Shorty Stubbs didn't speak for a moment, staring up at this stranger who was accusing him, then he said, "That's a damned lie! We didn't rob—"

"Hold on," Dean cut in on him. "You can't lie to me because I already know most of it. I'll tell you some more. That night you all had supper at the Commercial House. Then you took in a few saloons—had a few drinks. Then you started back to camp. Right there by the railroad yards you slugged Dean—jumped on him with your boot heels. And when you thought he was dead, you robbed him. Took that big black wallet with the beef money in it. Then you put Dean in an empty box car."

Shorty Stubbs lay there looking up at the man who had given him such a clear picture of what had happened out on that dark road at midnight.

"All right," Dean finally said. "You've had your chance. Let's go, Juan."

But Shorty changed his mind. 'Hold on," he said. "I didn't touch Dean Hilton that night. Dean and I was walking along ahead. Coburn hit him from behind."

"And then Taggart finished up the job with his boot heels," Dean supplemented.

Shorty Stubbs lay there quiet for a few seconds, then he said, almost as if he were talking to himself. "It was awful. That damned breed's not more than half human, anyway."

Dean turned to old Juan. "You got that, didn't you, Juan?"

The old vaquero didn't answer, even by a nod of his head. His dark figure might have been that of a statue, as he stood there, rigid and still, looking down at the man on the ground.

"All right," Dean said. "Let's see what we can do to stop that blood."

"Do you think you can ride to town and take him to the sheriff?" Dean asked, when he had used up his own shirt and Shorty's to bandage the bullet hole.

Juan nodded his head. "Sure."

"I don't like to see you ride that far, but I think I'd better go on and locate the cattle they're holding, and the rest of Shorty's men. It's going to take quick work for the sheriff to round up this gang."

THE first shock of the bullet wore off fast. It wasn't long before they had Shorty back on his horse and Juan was ready to take him to town. The old vaquero had been very quiet, but when he was on his horse he looked down at Dean and said, "I don' understan'. I never theenk Dean do what they say—but I don' understan'."

Dean's throat was tight as he looked up at the tall straight figure in the saddle. It looked tremendously tall in the dim light. "You don't understand how I knew all that stuff I told Shorty, do you, Juan?" Then he looked at Shorty Stubbs and chuckled. "Our little friend, Shorty—he can't quite get it, either, Juan."

His heart was very light as Juan started off with the prisoner, but when he was on his horse he overtook the old Spaniard and said, "I'm going to tell you all about it,

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Juan. Just as soon as the sheriff cleans up on this job."

A deep, warm excitement built up in Dean as he rode out through the dark pass that night. He was going home tomorrow. These fellows who had robbed his father would have long years in the Oregon pen to think it over. His own name was clear, too. Clear of the lying story that nearly everybody had believed. Nothing else seemed to matter much, just now. Hundreds of times he had thought of riding up on Coburn and Shorty Stubbs and the half-breed or running into them in some smoky saloon. He had imagined his heavy gun bucking in his hand, felt the deep glow of satisfaction it gave him. But he hadn't felt any great joy tonight as he looked down into Shorty's sick, scared face. He was going back home tomorrow. That was what counted.

It was too dark to follow sign when he reached the farther side of the pass. He rode off the trail a quarter of a mile, pulled off his saddle and bridle and let the brown Morgan graze. But he was back in the saddle as soon as it was light enough to see a track. The rustlers hadn't been careful on this side of the mountains. A broad strip of marked-up ground led him straight to the stolen herd. The sun was barely up when he got his first glimpse of the cattle, in a sheltered valley less than five miles from the foot of the pass.

Dean was amazed when he peered through the brush that grew on top of a low ridge and got a good look at the cattle scattered thickly over the floor of that little valley. Six or seven hundred head, at least, he thought. A small fortune in beef. Three men were guarding the herd and he added them to the eight tough hands in Coburn's outfit at the ranch. The sheriff would need a good posse.

He stood there only a moment, then he slipped back across the ridge and ran down to the clump of junipers where his horse was tied. Vague worries had begun to haunt him this morning while he waited for daybreak. Suppose the sheriff wasn't able to take that tough bunch of renegades down at the ranch without a fight. As Dean thought of his father and old Juan and the violence that might explode down there, he suddenly felt that he had made a tragic mistake in looking for this stolen herd at all.

Half an hour later Dean rode into the trail that led through the Tamarack Pass. He let his horse out to a long lope along the trail and felt some of the tension run out of him. But just as he neared the entrance to the pass he jerked his horse to a stop. Up there, a quarter of a mile away, five horsemen were coming down the trail, strung out a little, holding their horses to a fast trot. Part of Coburn's gang. That heavy-set fellow riding ahead on the bright bay horse was the half-breed.

Dean cursed himself for his carelessness as his horse slid to a stop. Those fellows had run into the cattle Shorty and the other man had been driving. Couldn't miss them. Couldn't miss seeing the dead man he and Juan had left by his trail. He couldn't run into that bunch now. He jerked his horse off the trail, turned him toward the open country on the south, and socked him with the spurs.

A yell came down out of the pass, sharp and clear. Dean looked back over his shoulder. The men back there were bringing their horses up to a run, angling off the trail. Taggart was spurring the bright bay hard, lunging him down the steep, rough slope below the trail, and the others were close behind him. Dean knew he was in for a run, a hard one.

Dean's gray eyes were worried as he looked over the neck of his running horse at the stretch of country ahead of him, a wide mountain basin broken only by low ridges and scattered clumps of scrub pine and juniper. He studied the rough, timbered mountains on the far side of the basin. Out there he would have a chance to shake these fellows off. Or hole up in some rough, brushy canyon and fight it out, if it came to that. But the mountains seemed a long way off as he looked at them—four miles, at least.

HE TURNED his head and looked back at the men tearing along behind him. They were crowding their horses hard, making no effort to keep together. Taggart and the man on the gray horse looked closer than they had when they left the trail, but the three others were stringing out, pretty well behind. Dean touched his horse lightly

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with the spurs, just enough to increase his speed a little without crowding him too hard.

He rode loosely, his tall body in perfect rhythm with every movement of his horse, as they rocketed over the rough, uneven ground. The brown's hindquarters jackknifed and straightened in quick, powerful thrusts. He cleared thick clumps of brush and scattered outcroppings of rock without a break in stride. The tough brown could hold that pace for a long time, but Dean was uneasy about the bright bay Taggart was riding. That bay had been one of his own favorite mounts and was about the fastest thing on the Hilton Ranch.

Another mile of rough, sage-covered ground swept by. The thin trail of dust rose from the baked ground was a lot longer now. The last rider was a long way back. But Dean's eyes became more dubious with each backward glance. Taggart and that fellow on the gray were spurring recklessly, crowding their horses as if they were running a quarter-mile race. They were closing up too fast.

A rifle cracked behind him, followed by more shots at uneven intervals. Dean heard the whine of only one bullet, well off to one side. Too far off yet, he thought, but they wouldn't be too far long, if their horses could hold that terrific pace. Then a bullet kicked up dust a hundred yards ahead of him, not far out of line. He looked back. The two leading riders were riding abreast now, less than three hundred yards away. They carried their rifles in their hands and were raking their horses with their spurs, trying to come up so close they couldn't miss. The three men stringing along behind the leaders looked small in the distance now, but they were still coming on.

Dean thought of that long gap between the two men in the lead and the three behind them. He wondered if he could stop and fight it out with the first two before the others could close in on him. The brown was a good roping horse, could stop in its own length. And that high-strung bay Taggart was riding never did handle easily. Would be worse now after two years of the half-breed's cruel handling. He thought he could be on the ground with his rifle and get a crack at the man on the gray while Taggart was still lunging around, getting the bay lined up. A bullet whined past. Close this time. He took another look at the men tearing along behind him. Too risky yet, he decided. The last three men looked a long way off, but they would close up fast.

Dean knew he had to do something soon. One of those bullets would be getting him, or more likely, his horse. His eyes went to a thicket of scrub pine a few hundred yards away and not far off his course. It covered several acres and the small pines were thick. For a fraction of a minute he held his course as if he intended to miss the thicket, then suddenly reined his horse to the right, just enough to strike it square in the middle.

He glanced back then to see if the two men crowding him had noticed his move. They had and they were splitting up. The man on the gray was spurring his horse toward the south end of the thicket. Taggart was streaking off toward the north. Dean's face was serious as he studied the thick growth of trees rushing toward him, only a few rods away. This was a gamble and he knew it. If he didn't get through those trees before Taggart and the other fellow got around to the farther side, he'd be bottled up in there, with two men on one side and three on the other.

He hit the edge of the thicket on a run, touched the brown horse with the spurs, and gave him a loose rein. The brown doubled and twisted through the trees like a jackrabbit in brush, slamming Dean against branches it couldn't miss, and kept on going. The pace seemed slow to Dean. A lot of time seemed to pass before he dashed out in the open on the far side of the thicket, but when he took a quick look both ways, neither of the two men was in sight. He wheeled his horse and made for the south end of the thicket on a run. His revolver was in his hand. If that fellow on the gray didn't sheer off from the trees too far, this wouldn't be rifle shooting. It would be close-up fighting.

The man on the gray dashed around the edge of the thicket when Dean was less than fifty yards away. His horse was strung out to full speed and he still carried his rifle in his hand. He raised the rifle, tried to get it into action, but Dean shot twice and saw the man jerk and straighten up as their horses shot past each other. Dean checked the brown and wheeled him around. The

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other man didn't have his rifle now. It was lying on the ground and the man's right hand was clutching the horn of his saddle hard, his body weaving in the saddle as he tried to steady himself.

Dean thumbed fresh shells into his gun and spurred the heaving brown ahead. The man on the gray was through, but Taggart would be coming around from the other side, coming fast. If the half-breed still carried his rifle, Dean wanted to be close to him when they came in sight of each other. The brown had just come up to a full run when Taggart plunged around the edge of the trees, less than a hundred yards away. He'd been too smart to hang onto his rifle. He had his six-shooter in his hand.

THE half-breed fired the first shot, a split second ahead of Dean, when they were fifty yards apart. The crash of their heavy revolvers was almost a continuous roar as two hard-running horses brought the men together. Dean's last shot was fired when they were less than fifteen feet apart. At that instant a terrific shock almost knocked him out of the saddle.

Dean made no move to check his running horse. The shock of the heavy bullet had numbed him all over. He tried to remember how many times he had shot at Taggart. "Can't be many shells left in the gun. Got to reload," he kept telling himself. "Got to reload." But when he focused his mind on reloading his revolver, it was gone. He lifted his right hand and looked at it stupidly. "Must have dropped the gun."

The brown horse slowed to a stop and turned around of its own accord. Then Dean saw that the fight was over. Out there a bright bay horse was running through the low sage, kicking at the dangling stirrup of an empty saddle. A hundred yards away from Dean, Taggart lay on his back with his legs sprawled wide apart.

For a moment Dean sat there in his saddle perfectly still. The paralyzing numbness wore off a little, but he was dizzy and sick. He looked down at the ground and the low sage and rocks seemed to be rushing past him. He wondered vaguely about his revolver. Where had he dropped it? Could he get back on his horse again if he got off to pick it up? A shout sounded from behind the trees. The other men were closing in. He pulled himself together, headed his horse toward the mountains again, and struck him with the spurs.

The motion of the horse seemed to clear Dean's head. He knew now that he had made a mistake in striking out for the mountains again. He never could stick it out that far. He was dizzy and weak, and the front of his shirt was already soaked with blood. He brought his right hand up and felt of the wound. High up in the chest, he thought. He'd been a fool not to hole up in those pines back there and fight it out while he still had strength to handle his rifle. Two bullets whined past him and he looked back. That fellow in the lead was doing the shooting. The other two were too far back, but they were spurring their horses viciously, trying hard to come up for the kill.

Dean's eyes searched the rough ground ahead of him and came to rest on a pile of boulders close to the top of a low ridge, a couple of hundred yards away. The boulders were not large. They wouldn't give him much cover, but they would help. He pulled his rifle out of the boot, dug his spurs in hard, and felt a ragged response from the stout-hearted brown. He was getting close now. Pretty dizzy. Mustn't go off his feet when he hit the ground. Then he felt a convulsive jerk. The brown horse faltered and lost its stride. It had been hit, hit hard.

The horse fell close to the edge of the boulders. Dean knew it was coming but could not save himself from a fall. He struck the ground hard, rolled over and sat up; but he still had hold of his rifle. The fellow on the black horse had pulled to a stop less than a hundred yards away, but was having trouble getting his excited horse lined up for another shot. Dean's rifle was unsteady as he raised it. He fired before he had a bead on the man or the lunging horse. The miss seemed to steady his nerves. He shot again just as the man got his horse steadied down and raised his own rifle. A moment later the black horse wheeled half-around and tore away on a run. His rider kept in the saddle for a few jumps, then slumped to one side and went off over the horse's flank.

The other two men had come to a stop and the nearer one was blasting away at Dean from a horse that kept throwing its head and prancing sidewise. Dean raised his own rifle but his hands shook and his eyes

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blurred till he could barely see the man who was shooting at him. He turned his head and looked at the pile of boulders he had tried so hard to reach. They were only a few yards away but he wondered if he could hold out long enough to crawl that far.

AN HOUR later old Juan rode up to the pile of boulders on the ridge and got off his horse. Coburn's men had left the ranch at daybreak, before the sheriff's party arrived, and Juan had been uneasy about the young fellow who had gone out through the pass alone last night to look for the stolen herd. As he rode along the trail through Tamarack Pass he saw the tracks left by Taggart's party and noticed where they left the trail at the farther end of the pass. The tall old Spaniard stopped his horse for a moment and his keen eyes studied the sliding tracks that led down the steep, rough slope. Those fellows had been trotting along the trail, but here they had broken into a run. Juan pulled his own horse off the trail and followed the tracks.

From there on, the old vaquero didn't need to bother with tracks. The wreckage left along the course of that four-mile running fight was easy to follow. Just after he left the trail Juan met a bright bay horse, with empty saddle and broken bridle reins. The horse was making its way back toward the home ranch. A solid streak of matted, bloody hair reached from its shoulder back to its flank, to show what a terrible ride the half-breed had given it. Farther on, Juan sighted two men coming in from toward the mountains, riding single file. They sheered off their course when they saw the old Spaniard and passed him a few hundred yards away. He saw then why they were riding single file. The man ahead was leading the other's horse. The other rider was hunkered over the saddle-horn, steadying himself with both hands.

A half-mile farther on, near the edge of a pine thicket, a gray horse was tangled in its bridle reins and a very sick rustler was lying in the shade of a tree not far away. Juan didn't stop to check up on the wounded man and he only slowed his horse a little when he rode past the sprawled-out body of the half-breed. Out there toward the mountains was another horse with an empty saddle. The fight had gone that way.

Juan only glanced at the black horse that was trying to graze with a Spanish bit in its mouth and he didn't stop to look for its rider. The man Juan was looking for had been riding a brown horse. Out on that low ridge ahead of him was something that looked like a brown horse lying flat on its side.

The tall old Spaniard's face was grim as he walked past the dead horse and looked down at the white, drained-out face of the young fellow lying among the boulders with his rifle partly under him. But he relaxed a little when he knelt down and held his hand against the blood-soaked shirt. There was life there, not very much.

IT WAS late that night when Tom Hilton got back to the ranch, after driving into town to help identify the prisoners and bodies brought in by the sheriff's posse. Verne Coburn had been found with the big herd of stolen cattle and had been killed by two of the sheriff's men when he tried to escape. Four of the gang were dead and three more badly injured. The rest were prisoners. Over six hundred head of prime beef cattle would be driven back through Tamarack Pass to Tom Hilton's range.

Hilton was surprised when he went into the house and found old Doc Miller there. "Hello, Doc," he said. "They've been hunting high and low for you in town. Some of these prisoners the sheriff brought in are shot up pretty bad."

There was a peculiar expression on the doctor's face as he looked at the big old rancher. "I won't go in for a while yet, Tom. I've got a patient here that I'm a lot more interested in than I am in those damned rustlers."

Hilton gave him a startled look. "Don't tell me Juan got hurt, Doc?"

"No, Tom. Juan's all right. It's . . . a young fellow that worked for you a while. Barrett . . . I believe you called him. Juan bandaged him and packed him out of the hills. God knows how many miles."

"I hope he's not too bad hurt," Hilton said.

"I'll pull him through," the doctor said gruffly. He was trying hard to tell his old friend something and finding it tough to get started. But just then old Anita broke

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in on them. She had heard Hilton's voice and came running into the room.

"Senor Tom, eet's Deanie," she wailed. "Eet's Deanie, Senor Tom!"

THE old rancher gave her a worried look and then threw a quick, questioning glance at the doctor. "You can see yourself how nervous she gets, Doc." Then he tried to soothe the excited little woman. "You mustn't do that, Anita."

"Anita's all right," Doc Miller broke in. "Come here, Tom."

He led the way to the room where Dean lay in his own bed, his face drawn and white from loss of blood and fatigue. For a moment the two men stood looking down at the unconscious boy, then the old doctor stooped over the bed and unbuttoned the clean shirt he and Anita had put on Dean.

"I didn't intend to spring it on you just like this," he said. "But I want to show you something."

He pulled the shirt aside and uncovered a scar on Dean's chest, a peculiar scar shaped like a letter V. "Remember when Dean's pony bucked him off on the mower sickle . . . when he was a kid?" He moved a stubby finger along the puckered edges of the scar. "I didn't do a very good job when I sewed it up . . . or it wouldn't have left a scar like that."

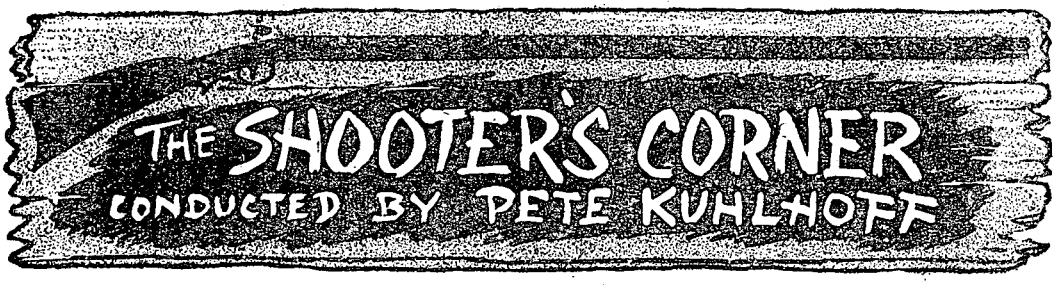
Except for the whisper of his deep breathing there was no sound from Tom Hilton as he stood there looking over the doctor's shoulder at that tell-tale scar.

"And now I'll show you something else, Tom," Doc Miller said, as he leaned over the bed and touched the white face on the pillow with a careful finger. "See this thin, little scar that runs down along the side of his nose—and this one here—and here. You wouldn't notice them at all if his face wasn't so white."

And then the old doctor's professional instincts rose above the tense human drama unfolding in that quiet room.

"Tom," he said. "You're looking at the finest job of plastic surgery I ever saw. Or ever hoped to see." He went on then, trying to explain this miracle in simple, untechnical terms that Hilton would understand.

But Tom Hilton didn't understand. He wasn't listening. He was looking down at that white face on the pillow—at his son. His heart was full of things that had nothing to do with medical science.



Mail Bag Roundup

Gun Laws in Africa

HERE is a letter from a SHORT STORIES reader who has a business and lives in South Africa. It seems to me that it is quite pertinent at this time, as it gives an indication of what could happen here in the way of useless gun laws.

In the past it has been the habit after a change of administration for legislators to write and try to pass foolish gun laws. So if we don't maintain a tireless vigilance and nip in the bud any such attempt we may live to regret it!

"Dear Mr. Kuhlhoff: Your Shooter's Corner articles have always interested me immensely, but after reading your "GUN LAWS AND SERVICE RIFLES" in a recent SHORT STORIES, *I felt I simply had to write and cheer you up by giving you some indication of how difficult things are in that respect in this wonderful country of ours.*

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A large party of your prominent newspapermen toured this country some months back and no doubt they will have told you something of this country, and its similarity, in many respects, with your own. We, too, have had our pioneers, our covered wagons of the veldt (your prairie schooners)—our tribal native risings and wars akin to your Indian massacres. Our gold and diamond rushes and boom town life, and many other things common to both countries.

From our early history, when a rifle (usually the German Mauser or the Lee Enfield .303) was part of every farmer's equipment, whether mounted or on foot. From the days when the wives of the Dutch farmers used to load their men's muzzle loading guns and help fire them while in "laager" and fighting off marauding hordes of natives armed with assegais (short stabbing spear) and throwing spears. Those old-timers, both English and Dutch, could shoot.

One shot, one animal. From then on, almost every farmer and his sons, has had a gun of some kind, (rifle, or shotgun) but seldom a pistol or revolver. The hand-gun is the Townsman's "little companion," and believe me he does have occasion to use it, even in these enlightened days.

Prior to 1937, it was an easy matter for any European citizen, town or country, to purchase a firearm which was registered, the gun stamped accordingly, and the owner issued with a permit therefor. From 1937, however, the system of issue and registration was tightened up considerably. (I am of course now speaking of civilians only.) Today said citizen must make application, on special form, to the State Police Post (Federal Police Depot, I suppose you would call it) in which he resides. He is asked what he wants the weapon for. If it is a pistol or revolver, the Police may even ask the man's wife if she had any objection to his keeping such a weapon. If it is a .22 rifle, the usual answer is for "Target and Vermin shooting."

Sporting Mausers, German and Mannlicher, .303 Long, or short magazine Lee Enfield Rifles, shotguns of all bores, and heavy rifles for large game can all be purchased through dealers at their prices. NO SUCH WEAPON can, however, be sold by a dealer, or any individual, except against the issue of a Police or State Permit. Thus, every weapon so sold is registered and supposedly can be traced. Registration of service rifles, however, is not necessary where a serving member of our Active Citizen Forces, (our Voluntary Peace Time Training Scheme for every fit male citizen when he reaches the age of 17 years until he has completed four years training) is issued with a Government Rifle, on charge, for the period of his training only.

We also have our Rifle Associations where a citizen can purchase his rifle from a dealer at dealer's prices. Prior to 1947, however, a Member of such a Rifle Association could purchase a latest model weapon, military pattern, for about £2.15.0, and bought ammo. at reduced rates. In exchange for these concessions he bound himself for service in the preservation of law and order, if and when called upon to do so, irrespective of his age. These associations have produced many of South Africa's finest marksmen so far as Bisley Shooting (similar to your Camp Perry) goes. This has now been changed, and the concession has been withdrawn.

I was a member of a Rifle Association pre-war, 1939-45 and purchased a brand new .303 S.M.L.E. Rifle for £2.13.9. When we had to arm our own volunteers at the beginning of the War, every rifle in the country was "called in." Many of us sold ours to the Government. Others "loaned" them. The latter class have been able to get new rifles in place of those loaned. We who sold, however, cannot even buy one from the Government. The difference between say £3.15.0 for a Government rifle and £20 for a dealer's weapon is, you will see, quite a lot of dollars.

Now to come to the point of your article. Registration of firearms in this country HAS NOT stopped accidents, murders, and shootings, and never will. Our system of issue of permits controls the purchase and ownership of firearms, and a citizen does not get his permit unless he is considered to be a fit and proper person to have a firearm. Many war souvenir weapons, however, have not yet been registered, although our police have issued repeated appeals to have same registered.

Many natives illegally possess firearms, which have been stolen at some time, or else

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sold by some unscrupulous person owning an "unregistered weapon."

Today we have armed robbers holding up pay-rolls in our Golden City of Johannesburg in daylight. Some of our housebreakers are often armed. We have had maniac shotgun killers in the country and so on. Registration has not stopped these. It only helps to trace ownership of the weapon; but of what avail is this if the weapon has been stolen.

We in this country rather pride ourselves on the fact that every youngster, more or less, at some time or other, has learned to shoot. Perhaps first with a Pellet Gun (Air Gun or air-rifle.) Afterwards with a .22. Then in the School Cadets, where he is taught Musketry, but only fires with a .22. In my time we used a .303 short Service Rifle, which can be converted into a very fine sporting job. I have handled one such recently.

The ordinary citizen values the privilege of being allowed to possess a firearm, and consequently is usually careful about its use. The unscrupulous person, however, permit or no permit, will somehow obtain a firearm for his nefarious purposes, and will use it too. How can you prevent such a person from getting hold of a weapon?

At any rate, registration of firearms in this country has not stopped armed robberies, gun accidents and thefts, I enclose some newspaper cuttings to show you. Of course, it must be realized that South Africa has only a few million whites and many millions of blacks and coloreds. Our Native Reserves take up many thousands of acres of land in the mountains and the coastal belt, and no European is allowed to live or trade in these Reserves. Consequently, when firearms find their way into these Reserves, they are hard to locate. The natives are born hunters, keep hunting dogs and set traps and snares to catch almost every living thing, and they do not hesitate to poach when the opportunity offers.

TALKING about wars and the filthy business of killing one another, I entirely agree with you on the subject of "obsolete weapons." I am 100% in favor of the soldier on his two hind legs, carrying rifle, bayonet and hand-grenade. Having handled most rifles and pistols since 10 years of age, trained in the use of the Bren LM.G., Vickers .303 Machine Gun etc., my pet fancy is still the .303 short magazine Lee Enfield rifle. Once having mastered the theory of musketry and given plenty of practice, well, a chap can usually "put 'em where he wants 'em." Automatic rifles and sub-machine guns have, of course, come into the picture too, but I really do not think the rifle will ever become obsolete, in spite of atomic and other weapons of these advanced times.

It is interesting to note that during the Boer War in this country, of 1900-1901, wherein Dutch were fighting the English, the former used Mausers and the latter English weapons. The Mausers were rifles, and the combined Mauser Pistol-Rifle was used then. I speak of the Automatic Pistol, 10 shot magazine inserted from the top, caliber 7.35-mm., with wooden holster which could be clipped onto the pistol and thus form an automatic rifle. Had one myself some years ago, and foolishly sold it, as we do not have much chance of using a long-range weapon such as this. It was a real beauty and showed very little improvement on what was used nearly 50 years ago. Sighted up to 1000-meters, it was a marvelous weapon for such a short cartridge, and very accurate.

There is much I would like to tell you of this country. How alike to yours it is in many respects, and yet how different in others. We have had our pioneers, our tribal wars and massacres; gold and diamond rushes, bush and veldt fires, droughts, floods and washaways; indiscriminate slaughter of wild game (like your buffalo); our big-game hunters—our wild life, animals, birds and reptiles. Your rattler appears to be your most dangerous snake. Ours is the black mamba. Lightning swift on ground or rocks and in trees. Grows to a length of 12 or 13 feet. Bite is deadly poisonous and death occurs within 10 or 15 minutes of the bite. Travels with its head and about one foot of body raised above ground and is a fearsome sight. Best weapon for this reptile is a scatter gun, although they have been killed with sticks, stones and rifle or pistol. A friend of mine recently found one crawling under his house in the country and caught it by the tail. He then swung his arm round and up many times,

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hitting the ground with the reptile's head until it was disabled. Well, a man is either a damn fool, or a very brave man to do a thing like this. His mother told me he has absolutely no fear of snakes. I, however, prefer to shoot them with a pistol, although I did kill a seven-footer with a small rock.

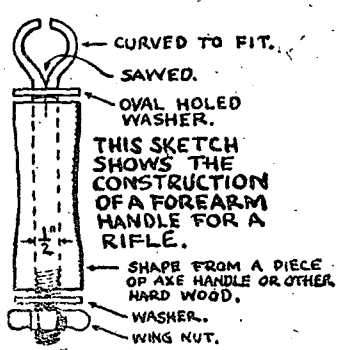
This country could fill a magazine with true stories on a par with many of those appearing in SHORT STORIES, *but we do not appear to have many writers on these subjects, although there have been some contributions to a local weekly paper, there has not yet been any produced in magazines.*

Some other time I will send you newspaper cuttings dealing with various items of happenings in this country, as well as pictures, etc., which will show that we are modern in many respects, yet wild and untamed in others. This is a country of contrasts, but I am proud of it, and trust that your group of prominent newspaper men who toured the Union of South Africa some time ago will give you good people some indication of what this sub-continent has to offer the tourist and settler. Meanwhile, my .22 Walther Automatic Rifle is in my wardrobe, the shooting season is drawing to a close, and I have not shot so much as a bird even. What a life! Cheerio until next time.

S. W. C.—South Africa.

Gun Handle

MAY I tell you about the "handles" we made for our guns? When I was on the farm last month I made up one for one of the youngsters and since you've been


CURVED TO FIT.
SAWED.
OVAL HOLED WASHER.
THIS SKETCH SHOWS THE CONSTRUCTION OF A FOREARM HANDLE FOR A RIFLE.
SHAPE FROM A PIECE OF AXE HANDLE OR OTHER HARD WOOD.
WASHER.
WING NUT.

writing about gadgets lately the thought occurs that its description might be of interest.

We take a piece of an axe handle that fits the hand, comfortably, and cut off enough to give a full grip. Then we bore a ½" hole lengthwise through the wood. Then we take a ½" bolt and cut off the head before sawing it lengthwise for, say 3½ to 4 inches.

Next you heat the bolt and shape the sawed portion to fit around the barrel, either in front of or over the wood of the gun, one half the bolt curved each way, smoothing it with a file to remove rough edges. Care should be taken that when the curved portions fit around the gun the sawed depth should extend at least ½" below the curve and be about 1/16" in clearance.

Take a chisel and gopher out one end of the hole in the wood so that the curved bolt will fit into it. Then with a rat tail file work out a heavy washer to an oval that will fit the curved bolt.

Put a piece of whang leather around the gunbarrel, place the curved portion of the bolt over it, put the washer on the bolt then the handle—which of course should have its major diameter parallel with the barrel's length, and tighten up with a wing nut and you have a handle that will enable you to hold any gun exactly where you want it! To my notion it's a lot easier to use than a sling and far more stable.

The boys out on the farm said we orter to patent the gadget but what 't'ell, we got 81 cents in cash and a job!

S. H.—New York

Answer: Perhaps some readers may be interested in adding this handle to their favorite plinking rifle. I haven't tried it out as yet. Ordinarily, I wouldn't take much truck in such a gadget, but inasmuch as one of our big manufacturers have a rifle on the market with a fore end handle I guess some folks like 'em!

Black Powder and Caps

COULD you tell me where I can buy caps for a cap and ball revolver, also black powder for same, and what the price would be?

M. W.—Missouri.

Answer: Black powder and percussion caps may be purchased from Farris & Son, Gay and Front Sts., Portsmouth, Ohio. Write to them for latest prices.

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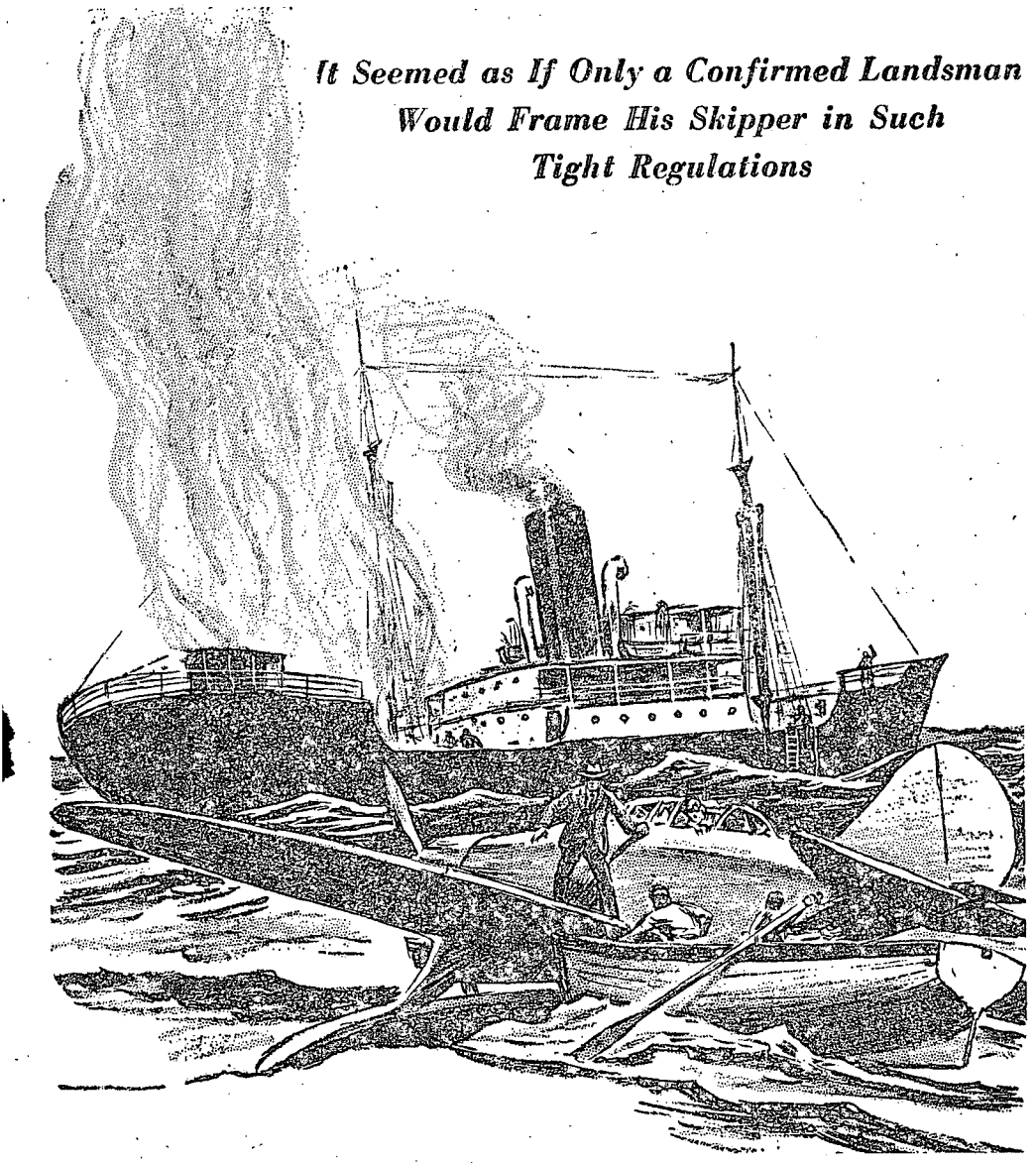
It Seemed as If Only a Confirmed Landsman Would Frame His Skipper in Such Tight Regulations



Subject To Further Orders

By B. E. COOK

THERE is no satisfaction, no future in ashes. Through a restless night Captain Cluett had leeched the ashes of his promising past to no avail. He had burned his record in one forced decision, in one crisis at sea. Today he faced the consequences.

He hove off the bedclothes and swung his feet down to his shoes for what he knew was the last time.

(I'd call the Coast Guard and take a tow

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to the nearest port again if such a cargo fire occurred.)

Dressed and packed, he paused, reluctant to turn his back on his cabin. Here he made vital decisions, settled crew troubles, chosen between alternate courses, fought innumerable crises. And won them all—except the last one. True, he had saved his ship, this *Hulbert Jones,* with half her cargo. Like her venerable namesake, he too had devoted his life thus far to Sulfur Transport, Inc.; today Hulbert Jones, founder of the company, was gone and Captain "Mont" Cluett soon would be.

But President Jones had retired in a swirl of honors and recognition; he'd even succeeded in leaving his lesser brother as port manager of the four sulfur ships out of Delta ports. Today, Captain Montgomery Cluett wondered how long the new owners would put up with J. Trevelyn Jones' policies.

He stepped outside, listened to the growing rumble of early morning traffic over Commercial street's cobblestones. Watched gulls gather over the sardine cannery across harbor, smelled the dry blackness of bituminous discharging beside the next wharf. "J. T. is fighting his job. He's afraid. He'd better be, the way he's framed skippers in his tight regulations."

Yes, only a confirmed landsman would forbid ships to call for assistance until decks were under water, forbid them to make for a haven when in serious straits. Only a brother of the owner could have upbraided, switched around, threatened and too often discharged mates, engineers and masters for purely personal reasons. High time somebody demanded a change.

But who?

The siren of an island steamer startled him from his thoughts and fired the smoldering coals of his resentment to white heat. Be damned if he'd take it like so many others had. Now that the company was in new hands, he himself would face old J. T. down—not merely to give him a piece of his mind, rather he would voice the resentment of all too many ships' officers against the ruinous handling of both ships and men.

Bag in hand, he was folding the message when the mate came above to say, "I don't think the fire sprung that bulkhead any worse, abaft the—" He eyed the bag, the letter. "I say, Cap'n, what makes?"

Saunders, good old dependable Saunders. Captain Cluett glanced at the message, then handed it to him and the mate read aloud: "'. . . end your services in the capacity of master of the *S. S. Hulbert Jones,* to take effect on the thirty-first inst., subject to further orders. . . .' What does it mean, Cap'n, by 'subject to further'? You're not fired!"

Cluett always smiled. His gray eyes narrowed, however, and twin spots highlighted his large cheekbones. "J. T. always inserts that little clause. It probably gives him a way out in case there's trouble. There never has been—for him, so it amounts to nothing. I'm done aboard here this morning while in dock; on pay, though, through the thirty-first of the month. You know the system."

"But, Cap'n, the new owners. They can clip that bird's wings. I don't believe he dares to fire you, not right now. Hell, you were mentioned for his—oh, I begin to see! No competitors allowed, eh?"

"Not that. I broke two of his foolish regulations: called for assistance when the engines weren't disabled and took a towline after the 'tween bottoms burst open. Old T. Trevelyn is showing you and all ships' officers that his regulations still hold."

"Holy hell, we couldn't lay there ninety mile south o' Nantucket until—"

"Until we smothered our own fire, repaired our oil lines ourselves? He'd say we could."

"But that easterly and the sea was kicking up," Saunders protested. "We could lose her off there and the crew in her. Damn him, sulfur cargo ain't gypsum. Look at the *Sabine.* Right this minute she's a question mark somewheres between Jupiter and Hatteras."

CAPTAIN CLUETT forgot himself in the startling news. The *Sabine's* master was his brother Fred, recently made captain and, in Mont's judgment, about as fit to handle either ship or men as a violinist. He steadied his emotions against so many ugly eventualities to ask, "Who says so?"

"The Second went ashore to the agent about taking a trip off. You know, after his First's ticket. He heard about it there. The *Sabine* didn't wireless her daily report

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of position yesterday noon. No word since she gave her position ninety-seven mile sou' southeast o' Hatteras, if my mem'ry serves me right, and that was day 'fore yesterd'y." He squinted into the captain's face for the effect, knowing the Old Man's poor opinion of his brother's fitness, remembering occasions without number on which Cap'n Mont had scolded Fred as a mate for his habitual neglect of details and superficiality and a persistence in rubbing men the wrong way.

Mont Cluett set his square face in a noncommittal gaze over the harbor. Gone from mind the nostalgia at leaving his ship. He had no definite appointment with J. T. and he'd make none. Now he had a double reason to stalk the petty tyrant. He preferred to surprise; he aimed to blast the man for a policy that hung another sulfur carrier up en route.

The parting shot must rate far more than a mere swan song. All the way uptown he assembled facts, incidents, rulings. In the plane to Boston, he unrolled the past like a chart, sorting out, planning his talk. Here, amid the changeover to new owners, was the time to speak for the men and he, leaving the fleet, was the only man in position to do it for the other skippers, for mates like faithful Saunders, for engineers—aye and for misfits like Fred Cluett.

CAPTAIN MONT CLUETT swept open the door. The surprise was perfect. John Trevelyn Jones raised a face that might have been designed in wet sand by a child at a beach. The sand had not dried. Now its humps and hollows registered fear, now the eyes blinked anger. But the old pose took over as he recalled his punishment of this intruder and he said easily, "So you take leave of the *Hulbert Jones,* Captain Cluett."

Had he presumed that Mont Cluett would come to bid him a fond farewell? The captain offered himself a chair, kept his cap on and let time condition J. T. for what awaited him.

"John Jones," he said finally, "the time I had that smallpox case in the *Sabine* at dock, you threatened a guard whose orders were to allow nobody aboard the ship. You'd get him for this, you said. You were not solicitous of our health, that time; you were after the ship's log lest the law get hold of it for evidence of your policies for an investigation."

The square face forced a cynical smile.

"A few months ago you haled in Cap'n Fred Cluett to make him master of the *Sabine,* contrary to my judgment which you required of me in writing. But you wanted, not the best skipper available; you sought one who'd fear you. Recall that after he entered this office you kept him sweating, then ordered him, a master in steam, to go close your window like some office boy."

"What is all this?" J. T. snarled.

"Evidence of your narrow gauge, mister. Consider the officers on whose integrity you depend. For years your regulations against entering the Roads, the Refuge behind Delaware Breakwater and Charleston for safety's sake in emergencies have forced Sulfur Transport vessels into needless beatings. Damage to hatches, upperworks and engines has accumulated.

"That nasty regulation against calling for assistance unless down to her scupperholes, sinking, has driven out three of your best masters. The time has come to end such regulations in behalf of both men and ships and to quit selecting officers for personal reasons."

J. T.'s long torso straightened. "Oh, is that all? Captain, yours and your brother's mutual disapproval is well known. And by the way he hasn't wirelessed a daily report of position in more than forty hours. If he shows up in one of those way ports, he too shall get a letter like yours. With immediate discharge in it for his case—if it develops that he went in with freeboard."

Mont Cluett sprang to his feet. "You landlubber!" he cried "Sulfur is very subject to fire. You must have heard how the old, wooden *Herman Frasch* vanished without leaving one trace, years ago."

"She was wooden."

The door eased open a crack. The wind, apparently, but J. T. gave it his complete attention until it eased to again. Then he said with divided interest, "Are you done? What is the moral to this swan song? Oh yes, as the new owners assume Sulfur Transport, I'm to change my policies. Captain Cluett, I trust you have relieved your feelings. You obliged me to take you out of

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the *Hulbert Jones* for breaking two regulations and we have no ship out of command at the moment. As for your brother, he doubtless has radio trouble. We shall hear from the *Sabine* before she raises South Channel Lightship and your solicitude for—"

"MISTER Jones," Cluett thundered, "you evade the issues!"

"Issues?"

"The men and the vessels. Morale among the officers is bad! Licensed men resent you. The ships are not in condition. The *Hulbert Jones* still sails with two sprung bulkheads you had tinkered just enough to get them by inspection. The *Delta's* main sheerstrake and margin plate are bent inboard and weakened and have been so ever since she rode that hurricane northeast of Cuba. The *Sabine's* wiring never has been safe from one short-circuit after another. It's time to spend money before disaster strikes. Those men value life as much as you do."

"So you blame your call for a tow onto sprung bulkheads."

"My report shows it and I hope to hell the inspectors—"

J. T. hastened to cut that one off. "And you've worked yourself up to visions of a short-circuit fire in your brother's vessel," he accused.

THERE was little satisfaction in Mont Cluett when he left the cool office tower for the hot pavement. He coveted none. He had laid the stern truth before the one person who should heed it and he never expected to enter that office again, God be praised.

He still believed that J. T. feared his job and that he could not forget the accusations; he might not dare to ignore them.

Heat rising off the pavement crinkled distant objects before his eyes. A fresh burst of traffic came roaring. The noise of it, the smell of abused tires, hot brakes and fresh earth from a nearby excavation assailed his aroused senses. But his mind was fixed on a mental picture of the *Sabine's* likely position. It had jelled in his brain while in J. T.'s presence, a spot on a chart he had put there by calculations, a circle of probability.

He visited the hydrographic rooms for weather conditions and left, convinced that Fred hadn't reached the traffic lanes into the Chesapeake or he'd have reported. Fog below Hatteras and east. Fifty or more hours of silence. Had the *Sabine*, like the old Frasch, gone without a trace? Burned and sunk in a low haze with all hands?

Of one thing he was positive: Fred wouldn't have allowed regulations to prevent calling for help or seeking a tow. No, his wireless was gone, probably due to defective wiring, short-circuit, fire—he fancied his inept brother attempting to cope with the crisis and, strangely enough, his brother's pitiful face rose before him. After all, Fred was his only brother!

(Here I stand, as inactive as J. T. himself.) He mopped his face and looked both ways in traffic, then seized his bag. (Today is the 27th and I'm paid till the 31st. But I'm through. I owe no more heed to J. T. rulings. I'm a free agent. Discharged but duty-bound to the owners.)

He strode up the street mid the honk of horns and a truckman's shouts. He vanished into a group poised at a curb; and the blond, bespectacled secretary who stood on the spot he'd just left, stared both ways without identifying him. He crossed with the others. (I'll fly south. I'll hire me a plane. What we can't see we shall smell out or—or what? What, short of serious fire or break in the power plant—fouled radio? Hell, he's got batteries.)

HEAT blanketed that southern airfield. The huge chart on the wall danced before Mont's eyes, yet he managed to lay one finger southeast of Hatteras, drew it down to west of the Bahamas in a wet line. Matanilla Buoy—northeasterly—right about here.

"Off there?" a plane pilot asked.

Mont wasn't listening. The *Sabine's* speed. Fifty-nine hours' run? Had run? His finger made an oval on the chart. "The S. S. *Sabine* is in that area," he declared to the man who sold plane service. "Take me out."

The pilot cinched his belt. His boss refused. "We took an apendectomy off one of those sulfur boats last May, Captain, and we're still trying to collect for it."

"I'm paying cash for this one."

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"There's almost no chance to locate the ship, it's heavy haze out there."

"We'll smell her."

"Smell what!" scornfully.

"Fire," Cluett shouted back. "Good God, you stand here inventing alibis while thirty-odd men fight for their lives in sulfur fumes!"

An hour later, the plane rode above a sultry haze. It thickened as the plane swept into the southeast calm. "Before we go down into that stuff," said Captain Cluett, "get this: you're chartered to lay me 'longside that ship. When you drop your spare tanks to fly home, you're not to report a disabled ship out here unless I myself give you the word."

The pilot's ears reddened. He cleared his throat. A puzzled frown framed his eyes. "I don't get it, sir. We report ships we find in trouble."

"Mister, my brother is master of that vessel. I'm going to save him from personal disaster if I have to take over to do it. You report trouble and out comes a vessel to assist or stand by, the news services raise the hue and cry in a thousand dailies. That ruins the cap'n with his owners and I'm to blame for letting you in on the situation."

"I get it. Helluva company to sail for, sir."

By and by, Captain Cluett's experienced eyes discerned a yellow smear to the distant haze. "Haul east by south," he said. The poisonous streak lazed above the murky mist and spread thin, but soon its more definite color became a tawny funnel up through the blanket over the sea.

They circled it where it bent downward to dissolve a bit east in the stulted atmosphere. Soon the pilot coughed in the first touch of its fumes and he exclaimed, "God, she *is* afire! Nobody can live in that stuff."

Better land. Heave to on the west side of her."

They found her adrift, lolling gently in an indifferent sea. Cluett marked the telltale sulfur streakings downward from scupperholes, yellow on the black tumblehome, where hose lines splattered cargo out of a yawning hatch. He noted the men on her deck, sweltering in rubber, yelling but moving without verve. He measured those streams from scuppers to the water's edge and they bespoke her plight. It must be serious because already too much water had been poured into her, she sat low and the fire persisted.

But where was the skipper? He yelled to two men at the rail, peering into the haze to identify the noise. They saw the plane take form. One waved, the other ran shouting the news.

"I'll not go closer," he pilot declared.

"Lower a boat," Cluett shouted. "Lively there."

The response was not lively. Time seemed to mean nothing. A mate came, looked, then waved men to the nearest lifeboat.

THE gristle at the back of the captain's neck came taut as he climbed the ship's side. He paused on the guard, absorbing the situation, the attitude of the men and nasty whiffs of sulful dioxide. And still he could not identify his brother anywhere through the blurry fumes that mingled in the haze all over the ship like a miasma. Until a mate came along, pulled the wet handkerchief off his nose and grunted, "You Cap'n Mont Cluett?"

Mont nodded, stifling a cough. What a greeting! Every muscle all the way down to his arches packed hard as a wet line, anger vied with disgust. So this was how Fred operated a vessel, how his mates observed decorum? His advice had been correct; J. Trevelyn Jones never should have entrusted a ship to him. Mont held his tongue, thinking: Me and my brother Fred, President Jones and his brother J. T.—damn this brother business! Then his disapproval broke forth in a question. "Where in hell is the rest of her crew?"

The mate scowled, drew the handkerchief back into place and from behind it spluttered, "I wouldn't know."

With that he would have walked off. Lack of courtesy had become downright insult, leaving a visiting officer stranded on the vessel's rail without mention of her commander. Mont dropped to the deck, reached over a bollard and yanked him around. "What goes on here? I'll deal with your cap'n. Above?"

The eyes darted toward the bridge, back again. The pants legs, plastered wet and

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yellow-dirty, began flapping backward toward the lower bridge exit. Mont came on, determined and puzzled and angry.

"Wait here. The name, sir?" It was unvarnished sarcasm.

"Mister, I am Cap'n Montgomery Cluett. Step aside." He brushed past in two determined strides and entered the lower bridge. He did not pause long enough to rap on the captain's door.

As with J. Trevelyn Jones only hours ago, he flung it wide open, advanced—and stopped.

His powerful figure froze, his gray eyes fixed and held. Fred lay on the bed, face to the bulkhead. Fred's wife perched on the edge of the bed like a frog, frozen under the spell and stare of a python, paralyzed. He read the succession of sharp thoughts in her stare—women absolutely forbidden aboard all Sulfur Transport vessels; more trouble here than cargo fire; Mr. Jones had found her out and, receiving no wireless in two days, had sent Cap'n Mont out here by plane—of all things—to displace her husband.

All in a twinkling he read it, then her temper burst in one long shudded. Fred must have felt the swelling tension in his cabin then. He rolled over and opened his heavy eyes. Mont recognized the sickness on his gaunt face, the worry, the fear; yet, Fred failed fully to grasp the implications when she said stiffly, "There's trouble and he's sick."

Mont understood; she'd have to do the talking. She dominated him here as she did at home. "Fire, yes," he said. "What else?"

"Broken shaft—Jones's son in the crew." She took a stronger breath. "The radio operator's body lies in the spare room back there. Awful. It's too awful!" she wailed and the storm broke over her soul.

Mont could not soothe her, he scarcely could sympathize in the light of what she had done. No master in years had so much as considered shipping a woman out and well she knew it. (One fool is bad enough; two paired up is disastrous. I said it to myself at their wedding last year. It still holds. How in hell can I hope to save that sick man from the consequences? How can anybody?)

He made an effort not to speak sharply. "Fred, who's in command on deck?"

Fred's long impractical face had become a bony nightmare. His soft mouth gaped open. Slowly he replied, "You're not talking to a mate this time. Get the hell off o' my ship."

Mont would not if he could. His eyes never left Fred's face, but he held his tongue while resentment curdled at being misjudged and the sweat of a grim restraint poured all over him.

"I see the handwriting," Fred snarled thickly, wheezing painfully. "J. T. sent you and that means I'm washed up," in rising crescendo. He dragged his legs out onto the cabin floor. "But I'm still aboard. I'm still at sea. By gawd I'm master of her!"

The woman laid a restraining hand on him, caught Mont's eye and shook her head.

"What's your orders?" Fred demanded and Mont noticed that one arm hung slack.

"None," he replied, speaking for the first time.

"Then what in hell are you here for and what—" His wife checked his attempt to rise. He flung her off with his good arm, sprang to his feet and the arm whipped across. The blow caught Mont full in the face. He reached out to grab and hold his brother, to steady him to his senses. The woman cried out.

Mont's hands grabbed only the sulphurous air. Fred lay in a sickly heap at his feet, where his wife tried to lift him to the bed. Mont's eyes smarted in pace with the years of scorn for temperament demanding a showdown long overdue. But Fred was not himself physically or otherwise. He helped her put him back where he belonged and left them.

She called after him, but he did not turn about. She came running. "What are you going to do?" she sobbed.

"Do?" He faced her bluntly. "Try to save his rating."

"But it's too late. Mr. Jones's son knows I'm here, of course, and he's got it on us," she complained angrily.

"I'm taking command of this ship. You keep Fred in his cabin," he replied crisply. "That is my first order."

On deck he confronted the mate who had

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attempted to brush him off. "You the First aboard here?"

"I'm dam' near actin' skipper," came curtly.

"I'm in command. Shut off all that hose." He went on aft to the Chief. "Afternoon, Jim!" he cried in recognition. "One glorious mess you have." They spoke in clipped sentences about the skipper, his wife's presence, the broken shaft, the danger of so much water being pumped aboard. "Chief, we'll have to try smothering that fire. Send up some scoops." He overheard voices in the seamen's fo'castle below them and Mont gave him a questioning look. "Yeah, Cap'n, old J. T.'s spawn's holding forth to half the deck crowd down there, by the sound, and he's not praising your brother."

"What's his gripe?"

"Aw, he's been undercutting ever since he spilled his identity. Then he got called for it. Then he threatened to squeal on the skipper's wife."

"Fred's not a man to take threats from seamen. How'd he get away with it?"

"The woman. She's scared as hell of him."

"Chief, did J. T. plant that rat aboard here?"

"No savvy, Cap'n. He signed on as John Trevelyn. Been to sea two-three years in these vessels, he claims, and his old man too workbound to catch onto him, so they tell me." He studied Mont's face and added, "You look like you'd been whacked across the face."

Mont Cluett's sudden appearance in the fo'castle entrance commanded an astonished silence. He had counted on it to give place and men a once-over. In no time at all, he took in the bunks lining the after side and far end, the steel lockers across. But the settee was not abreast the bunks as might have been expected. It stood near the lockers and on its far end sat, he knew, the person he was looking for. The lean body tapered neatly from the shoulders downward. The hands were long, the face bespoke a higher standard of living than one usually sees in fo'castles, he thought. The eyes kept a bold stare on him and the mouth appeared too ready for smart retorts. His was the air of an intelligent sea lawyer and he was the one to whom the others were looking for the next move. This was J. Trevelyn Jones' contribution to the coming generation.

Captain Cluett stepped in, saying, "Man the scoops in the open hatch. Bury the fire under wet sulphur. Come, lively!"

They exchanged glances, turned to their John Trevelyn. But over his face had spread a hint of fear. He risked a glance to one side, another. So one man grunted to his feet, two slid out of bunks. Soon they all filed out and up, murmuring about any plane that'd bring this guy.

All but one. He shouted belatedly, "Hey, you guys!"

The captain confronted him. "Shut up. Get to your dogs and turn to. Your ship's afire, disabled, no radio."

Jones, alias Trevelyn, gave that some contemplation and came up with a dirty smile. "I take my orders from the Old Man when I take orders. Who are you?"

"Master of this ship. Come, step along."

Jones crossed his legs. "Master? The hell you say."

Mont could absorb no more. He seized J. T.'s prodigal by his shoulders and hoisted him. Jones' fists came one-two like connecting rods. He kicked, he could punch. Mont wrapped both arms around him and hugged with all the power in his able body.

The kicking stopped. The punching lost force and distance. The lungs wheezed and slowed. The head started to slump. Abruptly Mont's arms flew apart and Jones swayed to the piperail along the nearest upper berth, gasping, weakened and furious.

"Shall I kick you up on deck or choke and carry you?" Mont demanded.

"Aw, shut up."

"Say 'sir', sailor."

"Aw, shut up."

Mont seized him, faced him about, held him at arm's length and repeated, "Sir?"

The black eyes fluttered on that big fist hauled free and ready. "Okay, sir."

In the end, Mont had to carry that would-be blackmailer to the upper passageway and dump him onto the iron plates. That was enough—for the moment. Jones resumed what he could muster of his usual manner and turned to where his temper drove the scoop into the sulfur.

Below in the engine room, Captain Cluett

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asked the Chief for an estimate as to when the vessel might resume way. Chief led him to the break in the shaft, to men fitting straps of steel for splices, men drilling, men cursing the heat, the vile air, while sweating into their eyes and hands and tools. "Sometime during the night?" Mont asked.

IN THE unholy mixture of pit sludge and perspiration, the chief waited while an oiler yelled for measurements from the lathe room aft. "With luck. And flip a coin will it hold. I've little faith in this job. Straps don't resist torque, you know; if the break had been clean we couldn't have done one thing about it. How's the weather for it?"

The heavy air promised no change. Dog Days.

"Seen the corpse we've got, Cap'n?"

Mont straightened at the reminder. "Not yet. What got him?"

"Same old thing this one always has had, wiring. He was an old hand at it, thought he could remedy any breakdown there for'd. But he was forever tinkering his sets, one for distance, the other for quicker starting. Poor old China Hand was a nut. The skipper was inside his doorway ordering a call for the Coast Guard, see. Sparks had some of his fancy gear hooked in, they say; anyway he must have thrown in the switch with something out of place. Hell, what an explosion! Cap'n, that man's face—better not look. Almost h'isted the skipper out of his shoes and it did things to his nerves. You noticed that left arm? His face isn't right, either. Hasn't been himself since."

"So that's what's the matter with the cap'n," Mont thought aloud, "as you see it."

The chief gave him a sidelong glance to say, "That and discovering he had J. T.'s pup aboard swearing he'll blow his top about the wife if 'any officer,' he says, 'goes too far.' Too bad, Cap'n; I know, he's your brother and you took him sailor and mate till he cut free, as he calls it. Fact is, a lot of things have hit him hard all at once."

The captain gathered only the essential points of the chief's monologue. For, in the back of his own mind a question had appeared: 'Why had seaman Jones been so determined and so ingenious about following, instead of preceding, him out of the fo'castle? Jones on the far end of the settee next to the row of lockers instead of in his berth like other experienced seamen. Jones' dark eyes darting this way and that—

TWO thirty-eight a.m. is not the hour for beginnings. Man's vitality lies at its lowest low. It is the ghostly hour of the day. But the *Sabine's* last strap had been applied to her broken shaft and her first assistant had smacked the shreds of his quid of chewing down onto it for a christening. It was time to resume into the north.

The *Sabine* moved in a labored creep, limping in the yellowish quarterlight, thumping out forty r.p.m. and keeping her officers' ears cocked for another breakdown that would be the final one.

Captain Montgomery Cluett catfooted the bridge, pondering as he paced. Of what avail had his coming been? The presence of a woman was more damning to his brother than all other ill-adventures combined. J. T. would gloat, another Cluett to make example of. He'd ruin Fred as sure as the sun rose at 4:57. Just as certainly he would make a todo because his twenty-four-year-old son had been accepted in sulfur ships' crews, under whatever alias.

(Feels strange to be beyond J. T.'s control. Three more days to the month's end, three to get this cursed ship somewhere . . . no radio . . . that shack looks like father's toolshed the time the lightning balled and zigzagged around inside of it.)

He leaned out over the end of the bridge to view the dull gleam of the filtered moonlight on water discharging out the hold. A voice at his back said guardedly, "Cap'n, we still draw altogether too much water. Plimson marks are a good two foot under, see, and we got pump troubles. Rose boxes half-plugged, fast as we clear them they plug and second assistant can't find any wiring he can blame for the fire."

The skipper's gray eyes appeared green in the strange light and they seemed now to focus beyond the chief's ear. His brother's condition colored every prospective move; there must be some way to save the man from ruin. He said, "What you've come to tell me is: the shaft won't hold together as far as Portland."

"That's the story, but who wants to log it? J. T. would raise hell."

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Mont laughed outright. "Mister, you just keep her turning up till I can get this benighted vessel past Hatteras into Hampton Roads and I'll be responsible to J. T.'s gaffings, not you. Let's get in before she founders under us."

"Or short-circuits another fire."

With the navigating officer, the skipper computed and dead reckoned the *Sabine's* position and altered course for Diamond Shoal off Hatteras, the most direct route to the Virginia Capes.

Four hours later he was shaken out of a forty-winks nap on the wheelhouse settee. Vibration, the sixty-pound kick of a deck hose, the noisy blasts of water driven under pressure against steel. It all combined to rouse that sixth sense without which no skipper lies down with closed eyes.

But he did not jump up. One learns by emergencies to check before acting, and so many seeds of emergency loomed in the *Sabine* this dank morning—the siren snorted in prolonged complaint. Fog. Mont's eyes sought the First along the forward wheelhouse windows where his narrow shoulders and pipestem neck would identify him against the dull gray outside.

He saw, instead, the outlines of the Third. "Where's the First?"

The mate talked over his shoulder, asking himself which Cap'n Cluett had the right to ask questions anyway. "He's fighting fire in the opposite side of that same hatch. Cap'n ordered it."

Mont went to the barometer, looked outside into the gray thick stickiness, cocked an ear to the noises on deck below and went in to read the last few entries on the scrap log. Fabian tactics, these; his status aboard the ship was unorthodox and he had to be sure of every word and act beforehand. His brother feared him, suspected him of coming out by plane in a burst of I-told-you-so self-righteousness to discredit him in his first command. Fred always had mistaken an honest opinion of him for hatred and unasked assistance for pure vengeance.

He checked the ship's course. It had not been altered and that at least was fortunate. He left the wheelhouse. Down inside the bridge he saw the cabin door ajar, swaying cautiously, then Fred's wife stood before him. "You've got to listen, Mont. It will be

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HOT LEAD EDITION

A stirring novelette in our next issue

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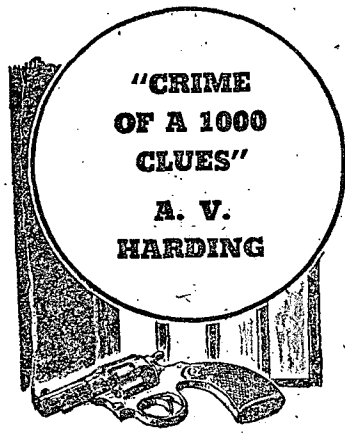
It's tough enough to have to work over the human suspects in a crime without having to worry about a snake in the grass—scaly variety.



"THE SHORE IS A GRAB BAG"

RICHARD HOWELLS WATKINS

In the next

SHORT STORIES

hard enough to be punished by Mr. Jones for my making this trip. At least, Fred must get the credit for saving his ship and cargo. You simply can't usurp him, it would be his ruin. The breakdown——"

While she ranted on and on, Mont's ears were cocked to the vibration of pumps which resumed the beastly business of setting the vessel still deeper into the sea. He could not explain technicalities to a woman, not at this juncture.

But he did note that she blamed herself for her coming. "I am a graduate nurse, remember," she declared defensively and that impinged on Mont's brain. But his response to her was, "Fred would have been injured if a nurse hadn't been aboard."

"Oh, he's not been well since he took the ship. I couldn't stand it seeing him worry and lose weight and—"

"Seaman Jones' first trip with him?"

"No."

Mont glanced inside at his brother, face again against the wall. "Perhaps it would get them by," he thought aloud.

"What would? Tell me," she demanded breathlessly.

He emerged from his planning, out of his hunch regarding John Jones, his doubts about getting the ship in off the shipyard docks. "He ordered the mate to fight fire with water after I had stopped it once," he reminded her.

"I—he—the mate reported the fire. I had to do the talking, I ordered it—for Fred."

"I am going to make a deal with you," he said, thoughtfully slow. "Relay no more orders, no matter what Fred wants. He is too sick and upset to use good judgment." (He never had that quality anyway.)

"You said a deal. If I relay no more orders, well?"

"I'll attempt to clear him—and you—for taking a woman to sea."

THE fog became the next thing to rain without the rain's modicum of visibility. It half-erased the *Sabine's* deckhouses, it became stuffy, sticky and impenetrable from bow to bridge. It overspread the spirits of nearly three dozen beset souls like ink spilled on raw whitewood. For the sulfur ship had become a haunted habitation, a black and buff ghost of the sea, wounded, too deep-

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laden, nearly crippled. Every beat of the tailshaft out the stern gland might be her final effort. Every whisp of steam where the fog touched the hot area on her deck might herald strained rivets down her side. Her suck pumps wheezed and clacked their utmost, but by now the cargo had found ominous seams in her inner hull and strainers could no longer be kept even half clear.

Captain Mont Cluett knew the ship could not survive indefinitely in her present and worsening condition. He had commanded her before, he knew her well. Knew that she could take in sea water in subtile fashion whenever excess burden buried her marks and the machinery sounded piledriver tones through every plate and frame.

Did Fred know these things yet? No telling. Did his mate realize? Mont gave the man considerable thought this morning while the siren snored and the bow wave scarcely showed. (Got to have his cooperation to effect my plan if we do get inside the capes. Now is the time to sound him out.)

The mate's smaller, wiry body came above by instinct while his sleep-drugged brain struggled against the fog from within and without. Confusion of command emerged first in mind, the vessel's labored crawl, the exaggerated influence of that sailor on the skipper.

Presently his heavy eyes rested on the bulk of Captain Mont against the bridge railing. His cogitations during his too-recent watch up here came back to him. Yes, he would talk to the Old Man's brother now.

Minutes afterward they stood in a wing. Mont had managed to loosen the mate's tongue and now he heard: "—was sick, sick of the *Sabine,* too. So he says, 'To hell with J. T.'s regulations, I'm calling the Coast Guard for stand-by. We'll give 'em that Jones sailor to dispose of also.' "

"When did fire show up in that third hatch?" Mont asked him.

"Fifty-seven minutes after the explosion in the wireless shack, the deck felt hot when I led coupla men aft with Old China Hand's body."

"What's the story of J. T.'s son, Mate?"

"He wasn't exactly a loafer, but he liked to hug the fo-castle almost ev'ry minute he wasn't on watch. Had a way about him like

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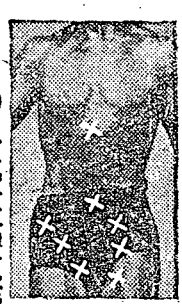

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a guy trying to act like natural and couldn't. Of course, we know now that he's old Jones' son and that accounts for his queerness. When we broke down it must have scared him, us layin' away out here in a haze like a lost scow. Then we had no wireless and I suppose it looked to him like forever out here. I overheard him curse the Old Man for calling on the C. G., but sailors cook up some funny ideas there aft so I ignored it. He was one of the two I ordered to carry the body aft and that blew him wide open. He went to the skipper, give his real name and swore he'd report him for bringing his woman this trip."

"That hurt," Mont put in.

The mate rose laboriously off the dodger. "That and being half-sick and then the injured nerves or something in his face and arm and the way his wife took it."

"She must have known the chance he was taking, bringing her along."

"But, Cap'n, she's a trained nurse. He needed her."

Then Mont explained to him his own peculiar status. "I'm out of Sulfur Transport at midnight the thirty-first," he revealed. "I'm on the payroll till that midnight, then, and as senior cap'n I've assumed command of this vessel to save her for my brother's reputation. I'm not logging myself as master, of course."

The mate formed a sour grin. "The woman question will spoil it."

Captain Mont now revealed his plan for drawing much of J. T.'s fury in that particular matter. He required the mate's assistance, he said.

"I'm with you, Cap'n, but that dam' Jones goes ashore and—"

"Mister, I've spent some time in the sailors' fo'castle while you had him at the helm on watch."

The mate stared a question.

"Later, mister. Let's get this vessel abreast Old Point, then under the diggers at some vacant berth beyond. Any diggers!"

FIVE blind miles off the whistling buoy the chief came above. "We're just about awash, Skipper. The screw's rooting like a submarine. This can't go on and on. Where are we?"

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The skipper's drawn features reflected his latest call on his brother. Captain Fred Cluett had just about given up to pain and to mental misery. He envisioned no future for himself. "Chief, if you can simply keep her this way a couple of hours longer—give her two at least. We're off the buoy outside the Beach."

He watched the chief down a companionway stairs in the dark and fog. There was no answer from the chief. A vessel suffers and labors. Almost she sighs under an overburdening load inside her hold, yet she struggles on like an animal which senses the fatality of quitting in the presence of lurking foes and the *Sabine's* foe was well nigh aboard of her tonight. The sea slopped in through her scupperholes.

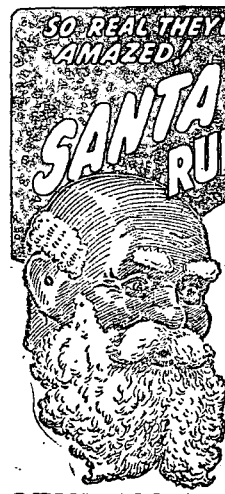
How much longer could she make headway? How much could she settle into the grim blackness around her and endure the ever-mounting strain on a spliced shaft? Mont Cluett could not stand still, feeling her throbbing efforts, sharing it. Fred belonged in a hospital tonight; his wife had been a tight knot of suppressed nerves too long. Midnight would be the end of the month, the end of whatever brother Mont could do.

The buoy flashed a yellow disc of glow, low beneath the fog. Its whistle moaned off a swell and the *Sabine* made on for the next one. Then she lumbered up the channel and Captain Cluett sent for the mate.

"It's time, Mister. Send Seaman Trevelyn up, then prepare to lower away your starboard lifeboat. We're due off Fortress Monroe in half an hour. You remember your errand? Work fast."

Trevelyn—J. T.'s son—came above, affecting a composure he did not feel in the skipper's presence. This captain had buffaloed him ever since coming on that plane and something was missing from the fo'castle. "Sir?" he remembered to say.

"Plant yourself in that portside wing and keep a sharp lookout. Plenty of traffic in this roadstead." Mont watched him move away, puzzled anew that he should have been selected for special duty and unaware that actually he was being planted in a wing where he could hear but not see the boat depart. Particularly, he could not get out of the captain's sight—or reach.



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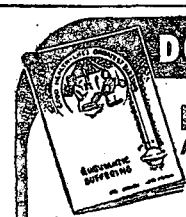

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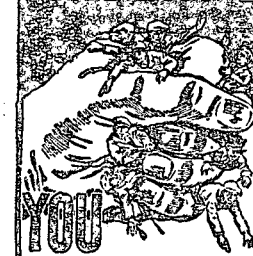

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FIGHT TB
Buy Christmas Seals

Off the Fortress, the *Sabine's* slow progress at that stage made it unnecessary to stop the engine. A sick man, accompanied by a nurse in her white uniform, left her with no fanfare and dissolved underneath the scale of fog in the darkness. The vessel made for a berth farther on where Mont Cluett knew there'd be diggers overhead to hoist part cargo out of her to keep her afloat.

Not once had he let Trevelyn out of his sight and now the first line barely thumped down onto the pier when up came a stranger. The man in the wing turned a furtive gaze. The skipper said guardedly, "That small sack with a purse-string under the radio below the direction-finder in the wheelhouse contains a coffee-colored goo you'll recognize."

"Heroin. Who?"

The skipper indicated the man he held, virtually a prisoner, in the wing.

"I'll grab him first, Captain."

Jones made a lively attempt to leap overside, but the narcotics agent was not the one who got there, quite. Captain Cluett had been too long braced for just such a dodge. He became a mass of blackness before the agent's eyes, then he stood to the rail with an ankle in either fist. "There's more of that dope in the seamen's fo'castle aft," he revealed.

Seaman Jones would not get around to discuss either Captain Fred Cluett or his wife's sojourn with J. T.

Then Captain Mont was turning the *Sabine* over to her second mate. "It is three after midnight, Mister, so I am through. I've probably spent four days' pay and it's been worth it as a wind-up for me in sulfur. Your cap'n's condition became so serious that he was set ashore in the special care of a trained nurse at Old Point and on to hospital. So log it, if you please. The mate soon will relieve you of command. I am no longer in the employ of Sulfur Tansport."

THE following morning the *Sabine* was light enough to go to anchor when a lad brought the mate a message. He read it and cursed. "Now where in hell was Cap'n Mont Cluett heading for? Old J. T. has quit and this is the cap'n's orders to take his place!"

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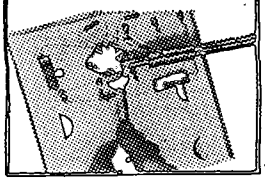
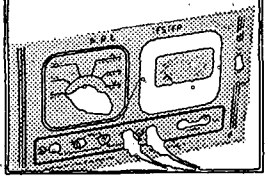
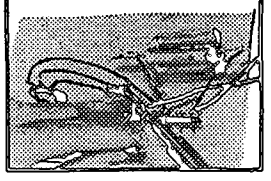


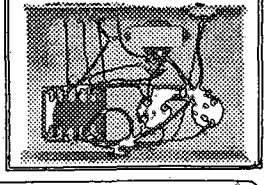
YOU BUILD this Tester with parts N. R. I. sends early in the course. Soon helps you fix neighbors' Radios and EARN EXTRA MONEY in spare time.



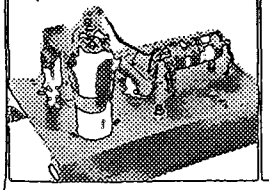
YOU TEST Radio circuits like this built with parts I send. Build special circuits; learn how to locate and repair circuit defects.



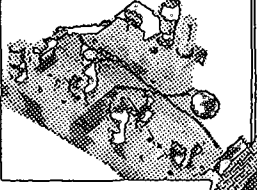
YOU BUILD Vacuum Tube Power Pack; make changes which give you experience with packs of many kinds. Learn how to correct Power Pack troubles.



YOU BUILD this A. M. Signal Generator for more valuable experience. It provides amplitude-modulated signals for many tests and experiments.



YOU PRACTICE FM (Frequency Modulation) experiments, get more experience with this Superheterodyne Receiver Circuit you build with parts I send.



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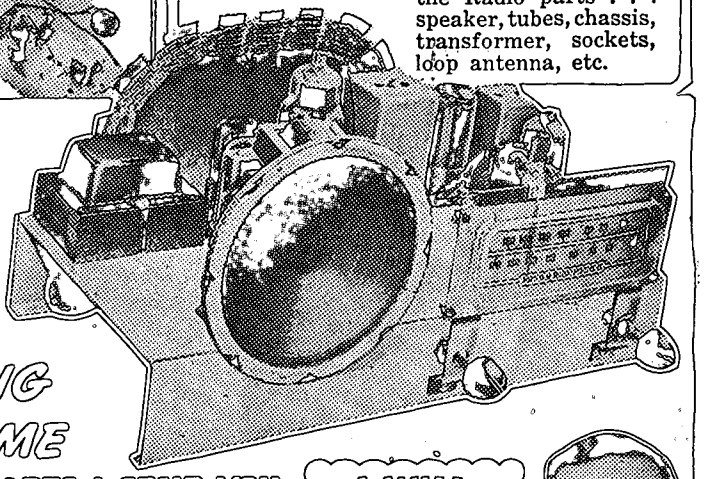
YOU BUILD THIS complete, powerful Radio Receiver that brings in local and distant stations. N. R. I. gives you ALL the Radio parts . . . speaker, tubes, chassis, transformer, sockets, loop antenna, etc.



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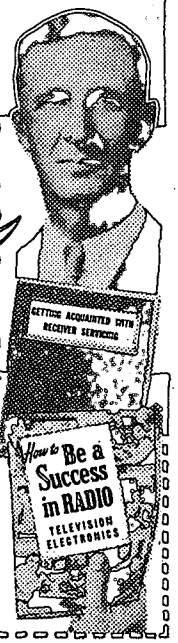

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